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North & West edition No 742

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Housing dilemma must force us all to change

IT IS an inherent truth that the vast majority of people don't like change. It upsets the status quo, it forces them to readjust.

But, equally, the failure to adapt to a changing world is a road which will almost certainly leave you approaching a dead end. Just ask anyone who thought they could avoid the internet.

All of which means we face a dilemma when it comes to addressing the housing crisis in this county.

The equation is, unfortunately, simple. There are just not enough houses to cope with the demand from a growing population. And, before you assume this must all be down to Johnny Foreigner, the reality is that actually it's more down to social shifts – higher divorce rates, more people wanting to live on their own.

The result is soaring prices to buy and rent.

So we have to tackle this somehow. We cannot have generation after generation unable to afford their own home or struggle to rent one.

The problem, of course, is that Kent is renowned for its open fields and rural beauty. And if you live in, or near, just that, the last thing you want spoiling your view or cluttering up your roads, are more houses or more traffic. Understandably so.

For the most part, of course, anyone living in a town has long since seen the sprawl of estates spread like a middle-aged man's belly. The piecemeal development largely passes unnoticed. It is only when the big ambitious schemes, designed to deliver huge swathes of housing outside existing conurbations are mooted that people start getting agitated.

But it has to go somewhere. And sacrifices will have to be made; the best made of situations. That, after all, is the relentless pace of change.

Editor **Chris Britcher**

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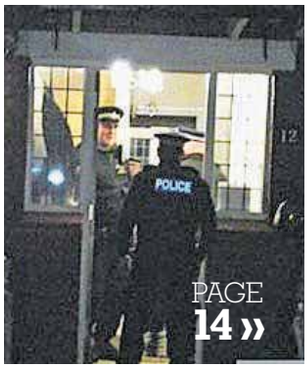
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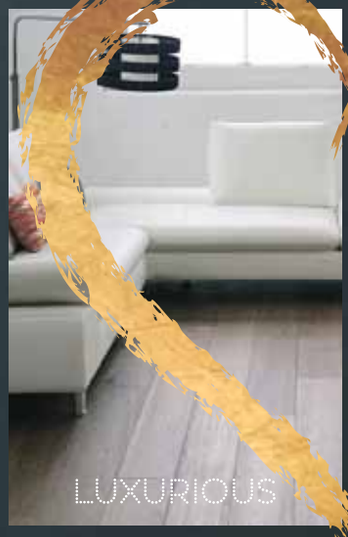

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Garden town design to be 'sympathetic' to area

By Tom Pyman
tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

CAMPAIGN: Protesters took to the streets last weekend against the Otterpool plans

PLANNING consultants have moved to allay community fears the Shepway countryside would be destroyed by a controversial development as it launched a series of consultation events this week.

Housing minister Gavin Barwell last month gave the green light to plans for a garden town on former farmland in Otterpool Park, set to deliver up to 12,000 homes.

However, with the process at such an embryonic stage, consultants revealed very few details about the project, saying it would be shaped by community feedback as it develops a masterplan for the 700 hectare site, near Folkestone Racecourse.

It was stressed the 12,000 figure was a maximum, with a more precise number of homes to be revealed at a later stage following various surveys and consultations.

Bosses also moved to calm fears from some campaigners, who marched against the plans last weekend, that Kent was losing its identity as the Garden of England, and insisted green space would be at the heart of the development.

Rebecca Kearney, development manager of design and consultancy firm Arcadis, said: "We're mapping where things are, where the water and green infrastructure already is, and that means we can then have our architects design the houses sympathetically so we retain as much of the existing good stuff that's there, and either improve the rest, or use the poorer areas for locating housing and infrastructure.

"A figure of 40 per cent was given at one stage for amount of green space but that doesn't take into account green infrastructure such as gardens, school playing fields, or green roofs on the buildings.

"We need to think about it holistically and we're not working to a particular figure, but it won't be swathes of concrete, it will be green in character.

"When you look at it from an aerial point of view in future, we want a good portion of it to be a good green colour."

Martin Whybrow, Green county councillor for Hythe, said: "Otterpool looks, for all the marketing spin being employed by the district council, as though it could easily become a commuter town for London, populated by people priced out of the capital. Is this area suitable for a development of the scale of Otterpool?"

Transmitter turned on to boost digital radio coverage in the county

A TRANSMITTER to boost digital radio coverage in the county was officially switched on this week in Shepway, designed to bring local station to over 800,000 more listeners.

The last of nine to be installed in the county, it brings DAB to parts of the county previously unable to receive them.

The launch of the final transmitter, located at Turnpike Hill, completes a programme of work to expand local DAB coverage to 95 per cent of households and roads in Kent, doubling the number of listeners able to access local radio stations to over 1.6 million listeners from 800,000.

The switch was flicked on Friday by Damian Collins, MP for Folkestone and Hythe and chairman of the culture, media and sport select committee in front of pupils and staff from Sandgate Primary School and representatives from local radio broadcasters - among them BBC Radio Kent and Heart.

Listeners in Kent are encouraged to retune their digital radios to ensure they receive all their available stations, including the county's local stations, on DAB.

In addition, over the past six months, eight further new transmitters have launched across Kent at Wrotham, Swingate, Etchinghill, Benfleet, Creteway Down, St Marks and Dunkirk. Collectively the transmitters have expanded and boosted local DAB coverage across the county, and brought local DAB digital radio to listeners in the south east of the county for the first time along the coast from Dungeness to Deal, including Hythe, Folkestone and Dover, and across the South Downs.

Ford Ennals, CEO of Digital Radio UK, said: "Digital radio is already very popular in Kent with 60 per cent of homes having a digital radio and 47.5 per cent of listening to digital so it's great news that 800,000 more listeners will now be able to enjoy all their favourite local stations on DAB for the first time."

Tories romp to by-election win despite united opponent

EFFORTS by the Liberal Democrats and Greens to unite behind the Labour candidate in a Tonbridge council by-election failed to topple the Conservative candidate.

The Tory Trench seat was open following the death of councillor Jean Atkinson earlier this year.

But despite the efforts of the left-leaning parties to combine forces behind Labour's Fred Long, Conservative candidate Georgina Thomas won 61 per cent of the vote - with Mr Long trailing with 21 per cent. Ukip came third with 18 per cent. Election day was Thursday.

Neither the Lib Dems or the Green Party had chosen a candidate for the election, instead giving their support to Mr Long in a bid to break the Tory stranglehold.

Son for Stones' star Sir Mick as he is father again, at 73

DARTFORD rocker Sir Mick Jagger became a father again this week - at the age of 73.

The Rolling Stones frontman confirmed the birth of his eighth child, and the first with partner and ballerina Melanie Hamrick, 29, at a New York hospital on Thursday.

A spokesman for the star said: ''They are both delighted with the birth of their son. Mick was at the hospital for the arrival. Mother and baby are doing well.''

The singer attended Dartford Grammar School after attending Wentworth Primary where he met guitarist Keith Richards.

The birth coincides with the Rolling Stone eyeing a return to the number one album slot with their first studio album in more than a decade, A Bigger Bang.

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seven days

Stories which made the headlines @kentnews.co.uk during the past week

Will Matt have the X Factor in ITV's live finale?

MATT Terry will learn this weekend if he has been crowned winner of ITV's X Factor - and thus favourite to land the coveted Christmas number one slot.

The 23-year-old, from Bromley, is in the live final of the show, which culminates on Sunday night.

On Wednesday thousands of fans turned out to watch him perform at his home town as he and judge Nicole Scherzinger rolled in for a live event at the Market Square.

Footage of the show will be broadcast this weekend.

Before the show, he met the mayor of Bromley, Ian Payne, who presented him with a certificate. The mayor said: ''Bromley has many talented people but Matt Terry has the X Factor and we wish him well in his future career.''

GUILTY: Jason Smith and the money

Wait goes on for crossing decision as parliament told of congestion woes

By Tom Pyman
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A TRANSPORT minister refused to give any indication as to when a decision will be made on a Lower Thames Crossing after a debate on congestion at Dartford rolled into Westminster this week.

MP Gareth Johnson called the debate to pile further pressure on the government which is currently assessing responses to plans for another crossing between Kent and Essex.

Highways England's preferred route for the crossing, known as Option C, is located east of Gravesend.

It would see a bored tunnel developed near the village of Chalk, with a new road being built from junction 1 of the M2 to join the M25 in Essex between junctions 29 and 30.

Mr Johnson said: "This decision is keenly awaited and we all want a decision to be made swiftly primarily so we can get on with building the next crossing so there can be some alleviation of the congestion that Dartford suffers on a daily basis.

WAIT: Still no decision on crossing

"The approach to the Dartford crossing is, in my submission, the worst stretch of road in the whole of the United Kingdom.

"We are sick to the back teeth in Dartford of congestion at the crossing and we ask that a plan is put forward swiftly to deal with the existing problems, and more importantly, we have the Lower Thames Crossing built where it gives an alternative to the motorist, which is east of Gravesend."

A decision was widely expected to be made before the end of the year but responding to Mr Johnson, transport minister John Hayes kept his cards close to his chest.

"We will take a decision when we've considered responses and reported on the findings and conclusions on the location, route and type of crossing," he said.

"Subject to the necessary funding planning approvals, we anticipate the new crossing if publicly-funded could be open in 2025.

"Highways England will continue, on my instruction, to closely monitor the conditions at the crossing, understand the various factors contributing to performance and to ensure we use this crossing in the most effective and efficient manner."

Dealer caught after selfie with drug cash

A DRUG dealer who posed for selfie pictures with a wad of fanned-out notes he gained from his crimes has been jailed for six years.

Jason Smith, 27, struck a jubilant pose by smiling with his tongue out as he handled the large sum of mostly £10 and £20 notes.

But the image fell into the hands of police when it was found on a media player after he was arrested for possessing cannabis at a property in High Street, Milton Regis, near Sittingbourne, on October 24, last year.

Police then seized around 1,500 ecstasy tablets with an estimated street value of up to £15,000 at the building, along with traces of other drugs including amphetamine.

Smith, of Boxley Road, Maidstone, was jailed at Maidstone Crown Court after being found guilty of possession with intent to supply a Class A drug.

Detective Constable Phil Pead said: "If there had been any doubts that Jason Smith was benefiting financially from the sale of Class A drugs, they were erased by the photos he took of himself holding such large quantities of cash. He was clearly very pleased with himself Hopefully he will ask himself if it was really worth it while he spends the next few years behind bars."

Eurostar tells Lords no benefits to Brexit

EUROSTAR has emphatically rejected the idea Brexit could provide opportunities for its business in a blunt reply to a Lords sub-committee.

The cross-Channel rail operator, which runs trains through Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International in Kent, was responding to an inquiry into the impact of Brexit on business.

Asked if leaving the EU raises significant benefits or growth opportunities, Eurostar chiefs said: ''No. There are no benefits or growth opportunity that we could identify from leaving the EU.''

Other issues highlighted in its submission included rights to work and rights to remain, with approximately 40 per cent of its UK workforce being non-UK citizens.

It also warned of difficulties for other companies who rely on its service to conduct their business across the EU and a lack of inward investment while bosses also highlighted an increase in journey time, effectively rendering useless the HS1 system enjoyed by Kent commuters.

Hunt for crooks after Christmas trees stolen

POLICE are appealing for witnesses after 50 Christmas trees were reported stolen in Herne Bay.

The incident took place at the Homebase store in Eddington Business Park between Sunday at 5pm and Monday at 7am.

During the incident a fence was damaged at the rear of the store.

It has not been stated how the Christmas trees were transported away from the store, but it is thought they have been stolen for further sale.

Detective Inspector Vicki Tyler said: ''We would like to hear from anyone who may have more details that will help us to locate these missing trees.

''It is highly likely that whoever took them will attempt to sell them in the local area or further afield.

''We would urge anyone who is approached to buy a tree, which is clearly not from a reputable company, to contact the police immediately.''

Anyone with information is urged to get in touch with Kent Police on 01843 222289 and quote reference ZY/43781/16.

Family of gay murder victim to sue police

THE stepmother of a Gravesend chef murdered by serial killer Stephen Port has said she will sue the Metropolitan Police over its handling of the case.

Family members of all four victims told the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme this week they ''want them to be held accountable''.

Asked if she thought the handling of the case was homophobic, Daniel Whitworth's stepmother, Mandy Pearson said: ''They took it at face value.

''They didn't want to know about the personality of your son, they'd made up their minds and that came across.

''We were in the dark, I found out most of the things we needed to know at a public inquest five or six months after his death.

''They were very difficult to get hold of, the police. Our liaison officer basically didn't liaise and that's my take on it.''

A total of 17 police officers face investigation for possible misconduct over the catalogue of failures in catching the killer.

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Grayling slams brakes on TfL plans to expand into county

By Tom Pyman
tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

PLANS for Transport for London to take over suburban rail services in north Kent were shot down in parliament this week.

Cross-party support had been voiced for Southeastern's metro services to be taken when then franchise runs out in 2018, with proposed benefits including Oyster extensions into stations such as Gravesend, Sevenoaks and Greenhithe.

But in a major rail reshuffle, transport secretary Chris Grayling put the brakes on London mayor Sadiq Khan's planned coup, as he revealed rail franchises would work closer with Network Rail.

In a speech to MPs, he outlined plans for private rail franchises to gain responsibility for infrastructure as well as train operation, with Kent one of the first areas to experience change with Southeastern's current deal expiring in 2018.

Mr Grayling said: "We will have the opportunity between London, my department and Kent to design an improved franchise for the future.

"My judgement is that we can achieve the benefit that TfL are arguing for through partnership rather than reorganisation."

RESHUFFLE: Transport secretary Chris Grayling

Kent County Council's transport chief Matthew Balfour said: "While we are disappointed with the decision, as we had carefully negotiated our 'red lines' with the mayor and TfL which would have protected the interests of Kent's rail passengers, KCC accepts the government's decision.

"KCC will respond as planned to the public consultation in early 2017, as the council's aspiration will continue to be a better rail service for all Kent's rail passengers in the new franchise."

Dartford MP Gareth Johnson added: "Dartford was always in the most precarious position over this issue given the fact that we are in Kent and not London.

"I had an open mind about TFL taking over our services and I asked them for guarantees for Dartford commuters.

"Reliability is a big issue on our train services and with 70 per cent of delays coming from Network Rail, sorting out this issue is essential."

Southeastern was contacted but declined to comment.

Protests over service cuts at County Hall

DOZENS of protesters gathered outside County Hall in Maidstone on Thursday to campaign against cuts by Kent County Council.

Eric Segal, secretary of the South East Trades Union Council (SEKTUC), said: ''Proposals to cut £2m from transport for children with special educational needs and a further £13.3m from adult social care is offensive. These cuts are hurting the most vulnerable and weak in the county.''

Bus driver walk-out on Monday averted

A 24-hour strike by bus drivers in parts of the county on Monday has been called off.

The industrial action by Arriva staff was due to affect depots in Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone, Gillingham, Sheerness and Northfleet – but a normal service will now be running across the region after talks at conciliation service Acas.

Patient admits guilt

A PATIENT who stabbed two members of staff and then started a fire at a mental health facility in Dartford has pleaded guilty at Maidstone Crown Court this week.

Myha Grant, 30, of no fixed address, had been receiving treatment at the Bracton Centre after he randomly attacked a member of the public with a champagne bottle near Brixton tube station.

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Repairs on Scenic Railway at Dreamland finally begin

AFTER months of frustration, repairs to Dreamland's Scenic Railway are finally underway, bosses have confirmed.

The Grade II-listed ride has been out of action since July, as its lift rope needed replacing, with specialist workers needed to complete the project seemingly unavailable over the summer and autumn months.

It came as a huge blow for the Margate attraction as it approached peak visitor season, occurring just weeks after operator Sands Heritage went into administration.

Dreamland chiefs said back in October the specialised nature of the work has caused delays to rumble on for longer than expected, but now it appears progress is finally being made.

A spokesperson said: "The bespoke rope for the Scenic Railway is now on site at Dreamland and the splicing and engineering crew are in place to work on replacing the rope.

"Once the rope has been safely installed, it will be tested thoroughly over the course of a number of days to ensure maximum safety and we then look forward to announcing the opening date."

Activists blast smart card 'a total waste of money'

CAMPAIGNERS have blasted the launch of a smart card for rail commuters in Kent as "a total waste of money".

Campaign for Better Transport argues the Key, which Southeastern says will replace paper season tickets, is simply a plastic version of the existing paper ticket and provides no real benefits for commuters.

Public transport campaigner, Lianna Etkind, saying: "This is a real missed opportunity for Southeastern commuters and a total waste of money a far as most passengers are concerned.

"We would have hoped Southeastern would've taken this opportunity to use the new smart card to introduce things like automatic refunds for delays or cancellations and season tickets for part-time workers, but unfortunately for passengers this is not the case."

A Southeastern spokesman said: "We have been tasked by the government with introducing the first phase of smart card ticketing to our passengers. Bringing in this technology across the entire network is a big logistical job and we are pleased to say that we have now done this.

"Future changes would need to be specified by the Department for Transport, but passengers can benefit from the new card now as it makes it easier and quicker to travel.

"You can buy your weekly, monthly or annual season ticket online and then pick it up by tapping on the reader at your gateline, meaning you don't have to queue."

Baker's Bake Off vow

KENT baker Paul Hollywood says the format of the Great British Bake Off will "stay exactly the same" following its move from the BBC to Channel 4.

The judge is the only original cast member to have remained with the show following its shock £75m switch.

Help lifeboat mission

RESCUE crews have launched a Christmas appeal to raise £640,000 to fund a boat to save lives off the Kent coast.

The Shannon class lifeboat, one of which is in use at the RNLI's Dungeness station, costs £2.2m. Much has already been raised via a private donation.

Bowie's Grammy nods

DAVID Bowie has been nominated for four Grammy awards – 11 months after his death from cancer.

The star, who grew up in Bromley and Beckenham and later lived in Maidstone, is nominated for his Blackstar album, released days before his death in January.

London stations closed

PLANNED engineering work is taking place this Sunday meaning there will be no rail services into London Bridge, Waterloo East of Charing Cross.

Southeastern services will be diverted to and from Cannon Street. Travellers are advised to check before they leave.

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‘Human swan’ flies across Channel on wildlife mission

By Jack Hardy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

ZOOM: Sacha Dent soars high as she travels from France to Dover

A CONSERVATIONIST who has been using a paramotor to soar across the globe for thousands of miles following the migration of Bewick’s swans finally touched down in Kent this week.

Former free-diving champion Sacha Dench is in the closing stages of a 4,500-mile mission to fly with the birds as they head to the UK, using just a parachute wing and a small propeller engine.

The so-called “human swan” has been travelling from the Russian Arctic tundra since September and landed on British soil shortly after 12.30pm on Monday, having taken off from France at around 11am.

Her touchdown at St Margaret’s near Dover also landed her in the record books, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) said, as it is claimed to be the first time a woman has crossed the English Channel by paramotor.

Ms Dench, was continuing her journey for several more days – including a stop off at Number 10 Downing Street to hand in a petition raising awareness of the birds’ plight – until she reaches the WWT nature reserve at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire.

She said she was pleased with how the Channel crossing on Monday had gone.

She said: “It went really well, we were predicted a bit of fog in the morning but we didn’t have that and there were a few delays, but then once we’d taken off the conditions were lovely.”

She added: “It’s great to be the first woman to do anything, I’m not really sure why no woman has done it before except not many women fly paramotors.

“I feel now I have crossed so many countries and communities I want to do anything I can to encourage or champion women doing adventures.”

Her 10-week journey aims to uncover new science about why numbers of the Bewick’s swans journeying back to overwinter in the UK has halved. She also hopes to highlight their plight and engage with communities along their migration route.

Ms Dench added: “I’m a bit sad the adventure is coming to an end – but there is no end to adventures out there.”

The cross-Channel flight had been planned for last weekend, but weather conditions delayed it.

RELIEF: Ms Dench’s joy at reaching UK shores is apparent at St Margaret’s

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Exposed: How banned drugs are still available to easily buy online

Exclusive: A special report into how the now outlawed 'legal highs', which have claimed the lives of a number from Kent, can still be bought over the internet. **Tom Pyman** and **Tom Bristow** investigate

AN INVESTIGATION by KoS has revealed previously legal drugs banned in May after a spate of deaths can still be bought online in minutes from suppliers willing to ship to the UK.

So-called 'legal highs' including Salvia, Spice and nitrous oxide, commonly known as laughing gas, were banned under the Psychoactive Substances Act this year.

The number of deaths linked to legal highs tripled in the four years leading up to the bans including high profile cases in Kent.

The drugs have also been blamed for a rise in violence in prisons and we revealed earlier this year an integrated substance misuse service has since been introduced in Kent jails to ensure addicts have access to the same quality of treatment as those in the wider community.

Serena Christie, 24, has recently moved from Tunbridge Wells to set up a business in Croydon after battling an addiction to various drugs which forced her to drop out of university in Birmingham after developing psychosis.

Her illness made her believe people were following her and reading her mind, as well as believing she had parasites all over her body.

"I got a job in a shop selling these drugs and while I was working there I was effectively a guinea pig for anything that came on the shop floor," she told KoS.

"I didn't realise what the drugs were doing to me, it was like I'd created an alternative reality – I became heavily addicted, I wasn't eating, it was the first thing I'd do in the morning and the last thing I'd do at night.

"Regularly, I'd sit awake at night thinking 'I'm going to die tomorrow' and then when you wake up you think that was stupid and you just start again.

"It's so easy to convince yourself you're going to be alright.

"I was referred to crisis teams and received community care for three years. In a way I've still not fully recovered, I revert back to those thoughts and I'm not sure I will never get back to how I used to be, I have lost my innocence."

Our investigation found the illegal drugs could easily be bought online on websites hosted abroad, but willing to ship to the UK.

Just one site we looked at barred us from viewing the products, stating they were illegal in the UK.

We searched for four banned drugs, AMT, Salvia, Spice and mephedrone – better known as Meow Meow.

Meow Meow was made illegal in the UK in 2010 but we found it for sale on one site registered in Singapore with price "available on inquiry".

Meanwhile, two pellets of AMT could be bought for 10.49 EUR from a website based in the Netherlands.

Spice, synthetic cannabis, was available for £17 for one 50ml bottle from the same website based in Singapore which was selling Meow Meow.

And we found Salvia could be purchased from a site in the US for $10.99 for five one-gramme extracts.

We contacted some of the websites selling the drugs and asked if they would ship to the UK.

One said: "We are based in the UK and all our orders are dispatched locally and delivers nationwide."

Two others confirmed they shipped to the UK.

Nitrous oxide, which fell under May's Psychoactive Substances Act, can be bought legally on many websites.

It is found in whipped cream canisters, for example, and has many uses, including blowing up balloons, which makes it easy to find on sites such as Amazon or eBay. Websites warn against human consumption.

Julian Brazier is MP for Canterbury, where two people drowned after taking the drug in 2012, and strongly campaigned for a blanket ban on the substances.

He told KoS: "The immediate priority was to put pressure on and close the bulk of headshops and I think that's worked.

"Drugs of all sorts are too readily available but we particularly need to clamp down on them on the high street and these measures will stop that.

"I am strongly in favour of more education on drugs – people need to be told these drugs can kill you and we have already seen a number of casualties in Kent."

Serena Christie agreed more needs to be done earlier to tackle the problem, insisting simply making them illegal won't make it go away.

"The fact they are still so easily accessible is very worrying," she said.

"I'm in two minds about the blanket ban; while they shouldn't be made available, you are not eradicating the problem, you need to educate people.

"Money should be put into education before people can experience the consequences of long-term addiction.

"I think it should be compulsory like sex education – I don't remember having one session about this at school.

"There is also not the support for those types of addictions and mental health problems – I had to wait eight months for CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy].

"But it's also important to know you can change and get back your life – I'm currently running a jewellery business, upcycling old coins.

"It's a therapy which has helped me come back to sanity.

"You have to be positive that you can make a change in your addiction and mental health.

"This was the most challenging thing to overcome so to have turned it all around was a very rewarding experience."

The law defines a psychoactive substance as something "capable of producing a psychoactive effect in a person who consumes it".

It includes drugs which work "by stimulating or depressing the person's central nervous system, it affects the person's mental functioning or emotional state."

The only exemption to the law is those substances already controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act, such as nicotine, alcohol, caffeine and medicines.

Poppers, popular in clubs, are also excluded from the Act and nitrous oxide is exempt when it is used as a propellant for whipped cream. It is illegal if it is sold with the likelihood of it being used to get high.

A conviction for supplying psychoactive substances can carry up to seven years in prison.

Possession is only an offence in a prison, detention centre or a young offender institution.

Supt Simon Thompson, from Kent Polic,e said: "It is a criminal offence for anyone to sell or supply these dangerous substances.

"We remain very concerned that they pose serious health risks to anyone who uses them and have sent letters to any businesses which could potentially sell these substances, outlining the new laws and their responsibilities.

"Offending may result in stepped action, such as a formal warning or prohibition notice in the first instance.

"Be in no doubt, however, we will use the full force of the law against those who then continue to ignore the new legislation or commit more serious offences."

ALARM: Telltale signs of nitrous oxide use are the empty containers which users leave behind after taking it

WARNING: MP Julian Brazier

RECOVERED: Serena Christie has experienced the highs and the lows

EXPANSION: Theresa May's government has pledged £50m for grammar schools to expand - with work under way on a selective annexe in Sevenoaks, left

Heads unite to oppose PM's plan to invest heavily in grammars

Tom Pyman on letter being sent to Number 10 calling on money to be invested in our non-selectives

NON-SELECTIVE head teachers across Kent were this week urged to sign a letter to Theresa May outlining objections to the government's planned expansion of grammar schools.

The letter, to both the prime minister and education secretary Justine Greening, has been circulated among all 64 heads of state-maintained secondary schools and academies in the county, expressing "vehement opposition" and a desire to see the selective system abandoned.

Similar to a note sent by teachers last month in Surrey, which has a fully comprehensive school system, it cites the success of education in Finland where a selective system was abolished.

It comes after Philip Hammond announced £50m of new capital funding to support the expansion of existing grammar schools in each year from 2017-18.

"What does the selective system achieve?" the letter said. "It certainly serves to erode self-confidence, to limit aspirations and develop a culture of 'second best' that good leaders in non-selective schools then spend time undoing so that they can unlock the students' true potential.

"The experience of school leaders in Kent should be valued and heard.

"Kent has one of the widest gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students.

"The very existence of a two-tier selective system is the biggest cause of this inequality. In fact, if you use the DfE performance table to rank secondary schools in Kent by the percentage of disadvantaged students you see a perfect correlation between selective status and fewer disadvantaged students, with all grammar schools appearing below all non-selective schools."

One teacher to throw his weight behind the letter was Canterbury Academy head Phil Karnavas, who last week told KoS projected £40m cuts to county schools budgets by 2020 would be "apocalyptic".

He said: "The public sector in general, and education in particular, is under pressure as never before.

"Changes, presented as reform, appear to be based not in carefully thought through improvement but to be ideologically driven or rooted in the personal experiences of leading figures in government.

"This situation is to be made much, much worse by allowing new grammar schools – an idea which, at a stroke, appears to reduce the pledge of a 'one nation' country based upon social justice that 'works for everyone' to rubble."

Precisely how many added their signature to the letter is unclear but it appears to be a movement gathering momentum in the county.

Joanne Bartley of the Kent Education Network, a think tank of parents, teachers, governors and other education professionals in the county against the 11-plus, also supported the letter.

Her organisation last month published a report after surveying head teachers in Kent, Buckinghamshire and Lincolnshire, and found 71 per cent of respondents preferred comprehensive schooling to a selective system.

She told KoS: "There is a real feeling of opposition among non-selective heads and we've had a number want to join our network in the last week alone.

"The primary school teachers also have to deal with the fallout of building up children who have failed the test - it's not fair.

"I guess the question is whether you listen to the teachers or the parents.

"I don't know how they'll manage it when there's so many people opposed, but I have a feeling the government are going to go ahead with these plans anyway because they're really, really keen on it."

Weald of Kent Grammar School in Tonbridge made national headlines last year when then-education secretary Nicky Morgan gave the green light to its plans to open a grammar annexe in Sevenoaks.

It came after local parents launched a petition urging Kent County Council to open a grammar school in the town, as it was the only main town in the county without one.

David Bower, chair of governors at Weald of Kent, told KoS the school was working hard to reduce the so-called gap and increase the number of disadvantaged children on its books.

"They say they are guided by morals in social mobility and they want to protect that because they might find themselves in a minority," he said.

"But right now we are looking at admissions for 2017 and giving priority to a number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"We want to encourage families who have previously thought grammar school is not for them.

"They say there is wider gap in Kent than anywhere else in the country because grammars take all the kudos but that's not true.

"I would say, if there is a gap, it's because of a difference in approach in east and west Kent so far as non-selectives' ability to produce high standards."

The matter was also raised in the House of Commons last week as Rochester MP Kelly Tolhurst asked if the prime minister agreed that grammar schools' contribution to education ought to be valued and given support.

"Grammar schools across the Medway towns have provided good education and opportunities for hard-working young people from a range of backgrounds, helping social mobility and intervening to improve recent Ofsted results in local primary schools, particularly in Rochester and Strood," Ms Tolhurst added.

In response, Mrs May said she did agree with Ms Tolhurst, telling MPs: "I believe there are now nearly 11,000 more children in good and outstanding schools in her area than there were in 2010.

"We want to provide a good school place for every child. [Ms Tolhurst] references the good work being done by grammar schools in her area to improve the quality of education in primary schools – that's exactly one of the issues we're looking at in our consultation on education.

"We want to remove the legal ban on expanding or opening new grammar schools but we also want to see grammar schools working to improve standards across the education system generally."

Mrs May has insisted social mobility will be achieved by requiring new or expanding grammars to take a proportion of pupils from lower income households, so that selective education is not reserved for those with the means to move into a catchment area or pay for tuition to pass the test.

Alternatively, the measures would require such schools to establish a new, high quality, non-selective free school, set up or sponsor a primary feeder school in an area with a high density of lower income households or sponsor a currently underperforming non-selective academy.

Teachers had until Friday to sign the letter, which was then sent to Downing Street to coincide with the closure of the government's 'schools that work for everyone' consultation, which closes on Monday.

Kent County Council, which runs many of the schools concerned in the letter, and is supportive of the selective system, said it was aware of the letter but declined to make further comment.

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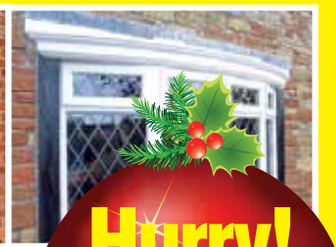

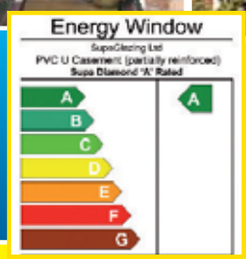

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Cops carry out dawn raids in human slavery investigation

Emily King joins police as they make a flurry of arrests and examines the wider issues at stake

ON a quiet residential street in Canterbury five police vehicles disturb the calm.

It is dawn on an icy cold Wednesday morning. Police crews have been briefed since around 4am, before leaving en masse to await the order to proceed.

In a co-ordinated operation, they will work alongside colleagues at Maidstone, waiting for 6am when teams descend.

At that point seven properties are simultaneously raided by police – a mix of residential and commercial; three arrests are made. It's a well-drilled, well organised swoop.

Because this is the latest intelligence-led raid in the fight against human trafficking, modern slavery and money laundering.

Some 20 people, believed to be victims, are also rounded up and taken to a holding area.

The raids include a string of outlets of the USA Car Wash chain, which officers believe may employ those being exploited.

As KoS watches the action unfold, it's done efficiently and with surprisingly little drama. Literally caught napping, now the work begins as questioning of the suspects and potential victims beings. "I hope you're happy," says one of the suspects flatly as he files past and is led into an unmarked police car.

Subsequently released on police bail until March 15 while investigations continue, he is Avion Elezi, owner of the car washes. He had been the subject of a report on the Al Jazeera news network which had made the claims which sparked the police investigation. When confronted by the network before, he strenuously denied the allegations.

The raids have been co-ordinated in a joint operation with the National Crime Agency (NCA), Immigration Enforcement and the Environment Agency.

All will be involved in what is likely to be a complicated and labour intensive operation.

Human trafficking and modern slavery has become a by-product of the troubles elsewhere in the world with the unscrupulous exploiting those seeking refuge in a foreign land, often sold on false promises. But to think of it simply as a problem involving those from abroad, would not be accurate, say experts.

Although the identities, and nationalities of the victims discovered in Wednesday's raid have not been made known, Kathryn Baldacchino, an anti-trafficking manager from the British Red Cross, states that trafficking does not just include movement across boarders.

She said: "Trafficking includes movement of any kind, this could be around towns, to another house, or another neighbourhood. A survey last year found that British was the sixth most common nationality of people trafficked in the UK, and when it came to children, British children were the third most common."

There may be many factors leading to a person becoming a modern slave or being trafficked, with poverty being the most likely reason.

"The factors vary considerably," says Ms Baldacchino. "We've met victims who have university degrees but have ended up as slaves because of a lack of job offers. Their lack of money and poverty status once leaving university has then led them to take dangerous job offers instead.

"When the victims are migrants, it could be the case that they were just so desperate to move away from conflict that they took any opportunity they could get. We've seen this a lot with Syrian refugees."

Some victims have come from conditions so grim they either don't realise their working and living environment is illegal or they choose to stay because it's still better than what they've experienced before. Making it something of a vicious circle.

Ms Baldacchino continues: "Many people don't want to be rescued as they're earning more than they would at home, and they believe they're managing the situation. They

POLICE: Superintendent Eddie Fox

RAID: USA Car Wash with police present. Inset, One of the suspects being taken to the station in an unmarked police car. Pictures: Emily King

simply don't consider themselves victims."

Linguistic and cultural barriers mean victims are unlikely to seek help directly, despite many living in appalling conditions.

Kate Roberts is from the Human Trafficking Foundation, a UK-based charity which grew out of the work of the all party parliamentary group on human trafficking.

It was created in order to support and add value to the work of the many charities and agencies operating to combat human trafficking in the UK.

She said: "We often find exploiters choose people to traffic that don't speak English and then they misinform them about the authorities. There's been times when the police have raided cannabis farms and arrested the only person there, but that person ends up being a victim of modern slavery. Many people are trafficked for forced criminalisation and it's not always easy to recognise that they are a victim. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 does state that victims should not be punished for crimes they commit due to slavery, but then it's hard to prove that they are victims of exploitation."

Adds Ms Baldacchino: "The problem is that what traffickers tell their victims can be true. Third party migrants may be deported or punished for crimes they have been made to commit if legal representation isn't able to prove they were being forced into it. There has also been times when victims have come into contact with police on several occasions before they're picked up meaning they loose faith in the authoritative system."

Once victims have been helped by police, where they end up depends on their nationality and status.

"Third party victims, for example Turkish people, may be able to seek asylum but they can't do this purely because they've been trafficked," said Ms Baldacchino. "They have to have come from a war or conflict for them to gain asylum in the UK. If they're EU citizens, they can go and find more work but a lot of them end up homeless and some even return back to the conditions they came from."

It's a complicated and often time-consuming process.

Adds Kate Roberts: "If they want to, they can access the National Referral Mechanism, a government scheme which gives victims 45 days of assistance, accommodation, money and legal advice while they are being identified as slaves or victims of trafficking.

"But 45 days isn't really enough, and isn't going to solve their problems. They feel they deserve compensation for the pay they didn't get, somewhere to work, and in some cases they need medical care and counselling.

"The authorities need to take trafficking and slavery more seriously in order to get victims to speak out, because at the minute they are low risk, high profit crimes that too little people are being prosecuted for."

And the public is being urged to play its role in identifying those being exploited.

Ms Baldacchino, from the British Red Cross, emphasises: "You should look out for a lot of people that live at the same address but don't appear to be related, one vehicle picking a lot of people up and dropping them off again, residents who don't leave their house unaccompanied or at all, people that always wear the same clothes, or people who appear fearful or worried often.

"We would recommend you develop trust with the victim, if you can, and then you can convince them to come forward themselves."

Police arrested three people, and rescued 20, during Wednesday morning's raids.

Avion Elezi, 36, and a 21-year-old woman, were released on police bail on Thursday. A 32-year-old man, also from Canterbury, was released without charge.

Superintendent Eddie Fox, said: "We've got over 20 workers from those sites with us at the moment at a reception centre run by ourselves and the other agencies. Our priority at the moment is their health and welfare, and trying to understand their personal situation.

"One of the challenges of the investigation is that some of the workers may not consider themselves to be victims. We need to determine and explain what some of the standards within this country are.

"We have worked closely with our partners at the NCA and Immigration Enforcement as part of this operation and would ask anyone who may have information that may prove useful to this investigation, to come forward."

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C. Miserable Manchester

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BREATHTAKING: Skate around the Christmas tree at Bluewater this festive season

How X-rays proved the massacre of thousands

Chris Murphy speaks to a radiographer who played a vital role in proving the guilt of two notorious war criminals

A RADIOGRAPHER who played a key role in helping to bring down two of the world's most notorious war criminals has been speaking about the mass graves he discovered in Bosnia.

Mark Viner, from Sevenoaks, was part of the team bringing former president of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic and his military commander Ratko Mladic to face justice at The Hague in Holland.

Former psychiatrist Karadzic, 71, known as the Butcher of Bosnia, was found guilty of genocide in March this year, and jailed for 40 years.

Mr Viner was part of the team that worked tirelessly to uncover the fate of thousands of victims in mass graves.

As a radiographer, he used his skills to establish the cause of death of the bodies. Mr Viner dedicated seven years of his life to compiling enough evidence to convict the pair of war criminals.

The technician was able to prove using X-rays that death was caused by bullets entering the bodies; victims of the Srebrenica massacre.

He was also involved in identifying the bodies, so families could finally have some closure on a missing relative.

The slaughter saw the deaths of some 8,000 people, usually men and boys. The Muslim Bosniaks were killed during July 1995 by Mladic's Bosnian Army of Republika Srpska.

International courts legally decided in the early 2000s this event was genocide.

Recently, two decades after the first mass grave was found, Mr Viner returned to Bosnia to pay his respects at a cemetery where more than 6,000 are now properly interred.

Mr Viner said: "I remember watching scenes of the war in Bosnia on the TV in the early 1990s. Like many, I cannot claim to have understood at the time what prompted such a vicious conflict in what had been until then a quiet corner of Europe, but I remember being appalled by the savagery of the events that were being reported."

In the summer of 1996, he was invited by a leading pathologist to find and head up a 50-strong team of radiographers.

He said: "We were to assist the forensic teams working to investigate the genocide in the former Yugoslavia. I immediately said yes, not really knowing how that one word was to change my life.

"X-ray imaging technology was used to locate and retrieve bullets from exhumed bodies, document evidence of trauma and provide information that would subsequently allow the victims to be identified. I personally undertook over 14 'tours of duty' working in temporary mortuaries in Bosnia, Kosovo and Croatia alongside an international team of experts and investigators and by far the largest and most significant case that we investigated was the Srebrenica massacre."

Arriving in the relatively safe town of Visoko where a temporary mortuary had been established, he started to receive the remains of hundreds of victims that had been exhumed from mass graves.

"Whilst I had seen many dead bodies and victims of trauma in my career – the result of 15 years working in major London hospitals during several Irish terrorist campaigns – nothing had quite prepared me for investigating murders conducted on such an industrial scale," he said.

"We worked tirelessly, often for long hours, working with pathologists, anthropologists and investigators to examine the deceased with our X-ray machine, searching for and retrieving bullets, shell casings and other items of evidence that might be able to be used to establish a link to the perpetrators, recording and photographing the trauma inflicted by these weapons on the bones of the victims and giving voice to the pain that they had suffered.

"In the early days, the equipment we had to use was sometimes faulty or not ideal for the task and evenings were spent repairing or modifying our tools to better undertake the work.

"As forensic experts it is important that we examine the evidence in front of us objectively and impartially and without pre-conceptions. At the time therefore I did not have a great knowledge of the events that had taken place – other than from news reports – and as the mortuary was some distance from the scene of the atrocities we did not directly meet any of the relatives of the victims."

GRIEF: A relative mourns the murdered at the Potocari Cemetery. Picture:Remembering Srebrenica

He added: "I remember being touched by the warmth of the hospitality of the people of Visoko, many of whom had suffered terribly during the war, who took us into their homes and provided hospitality and friendship. They knew, as we did, that we were performing a vitally important task – to piece together the facts that would enable the true story of these crimes to be told to the world, to bring the perpetrators to justice and hopefully in some way to help prevent such evil ever happening again."

That work has lead to his profession establishing new standards for forensic radiological investigation, and developed courses at a number of UK universities to train radiographers in forensic imaging.

"I have continued to advise the United Nations International Criminal Court and UK government departments on the equipment and procedures needed for large scale investigations and I have worked with teams investigating war crimes in Sierra Leone," he said.

"In 2004, recognising the need for international standards and cooperation, I co-founded the International Association of Forensic Radiographers together with some of the other radiographers that worked in Bosnia and as part of this we created a response team for mass incidents. This team was called upon during the Asian tsunami and the London bombings in 2005 and was integrated into the UK Disaster Victim Identification team formed in 2006."

And he went on: "I have worked for a number of years with the Inforce Foundation, later becoming the CEO of this charity formed to establish a centre of excellence for the investigation of genocide. In addition to publishing a scientific textbook setting out recommendations for standard procedures for investigating mass graves, we also trained an Iraqi forensic team to examine victims of genocide in Iraq, established training courses for UK police involved in disaster victim Identification at home and overseas, and undertook training for humanitarian groups seeking to recover the disappeared in Colombia."

On his return to Bosnia, he said: "It was truly humbling to listen to and talk with survivors of the massacre who had lain for hours amongst the dead bodies of their murdered friends and relatives before crawling miles to safety and to listen to the testimony of the mothers who had searched tirelessly for the remains of their sons for years before finally learning of their fate. For me it underlined the importance of the work that we undertook – not only in bringing the murderers to justice in The Hague but for bringing closure and some small glimmer of hope in a better future for those that remain."

He concludes: "Whilst it was impressive to see the physical rebuilding of the country, there is still much work to do to restore trust and belief in a shared future amongst the population. As in many other such conflicts around the world, attempts at reconciliation must start with an understanding of the truth surrounding the events that occurred and I believe that forensic science must play a pivotal role in this process.

"The lessons of Srebrenica must never be forgotten."

REMAINS: Piecing together the bones. Picture: Rooful Ali

The £6m revolving fund rejuvenating our empty properties

Special report: We take a tour of once abandoned sites to see how they are being transformed to ease housing crisis

By Chris Britcher
chris.britcher@archant.co.uk

WALKING into a six-storey proud Victorian property on Folkestone's sea front, it is hard to imagine it as anything other than a rather plush series of apartments offering some rather fine views across the beach and Channel.

As we stand in a completed room, with its large bay windows allowing the low winter sun to flood in, it has all the latest fixtures and fittings and is well furnished. Little surprise then, that the owner is likely to clear £1 million when the final contracts are signed and all six rooms are let.

Yet this property, up until just a few short years ago, was lying empty and in a state of almost complete disrepair.

Drenched in history – it was in this very building in which Army intelligence during the First World War coordinated the activity of its spy network – it had gone the way of so many in Kent's coastal towns.

From a hotel to a bedsit it was then abandoned. A crying shame more pronounced by the fact it sits overlooking an area which is set to be the focus of one of the biggest transformations Folkestone will have seen for decades, as former Saga billionaire turned philanthropist Roger De Haan continues his investment in the town by developing what was previously home to the Rotunda amusement park.

Yet this property has been transformed courtesy of the investment and support of one of Kent County Council's finest unsung schemes; dedicated to playing its part in easing the housing crisis by bringing back into use properties which have long stood empty.

With a cash pot of some £6million, No Use Empty uses public money as a permanently revolving series of loans available to small developers to return properties which have stood empty for more than six months, back into use.

In doing so, neighbourhoods are transformed, antisocial behaviour reduced and, most significantly, housing units created – much of it affordable – without the need of cementing over the green open spaces we, as a county, so cherish.

Martin Neame is the developer behind the Marine Parade site on Folkestone seafront. He bought the mighty property at auction and has completed the transformation of half of it - courtesy of No Use Empty (NUE).

Standing in one of the transformed rooms, he explained to KoS: "This is my second NUE project. I previously worked with it on a project I had in Margate, which was very similar. There I had two houses which needed to be converted into 10 flats I wanted to rent out.

"I'd bought the properties, but didn't have the money to do the development work. I found out about NUE through Thanet District Council. I approached them and they said they'd lend me the money interest free – it saved my bacon.

"Three or four years later, I bought this property in Folkestone at auction. There were some planning issues but again, spoke to the NUE team and they sorted out the finan-

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CHANGES: Before and after shots of Solini Court in Dover Road, Folkestone

WHAT IS NO USE EMPTY?

KENT County Council launched the initiative in 2005 as part of its public sector service agreement targets, to examine better ways of delivering services and working more effectively with district councils.

The primary aim of NUE is to improve the physical urban environment in Kent by bringing empty properties back into use as quality housing accommodation.

Through its website – www.no-use-empty.org – it has developed an information resource for owners, residents and anyone else with an interest in empty properties. In addition, it provides training for local authority personnel involved in this work, plus practical on the ground guidance for property officers and local authority staff to educate them on methods to bring empty properties back into use.

The main headline grabbing aspect, however, are the three strands of financial assistance – utilising its £6m of capital funding. These are:

- Interest free loans: Available to owners/developers for refurbishment or conversion of empty homes and redundant commercial buildings, to provide good quality residential accommodation. On completion, properties must then be available for sale or rent. The maximum loan per unit is £25,000 and the maximum amount per applicant is £175,000. It is based on a maximum 90 per cent loan to value on the property offered as security. Once a loan is repaid, the money immediate goes into another property.
- Partnership fund: Available to help districts undertake enforcement where necessary - such as compulsory purchase orders. District councils have extensive powers to deal with run down empty properties, but often lack both financial resources and personnel or knowledge to utilise them.
- Direct purchase scheme: Involves the acquisition of empty properties by KCC for redevelopment into good quality housing accommodation.

cial issues and suddenly we have another loan and another development.

"Six flats brought back into use and ready to bring back into the market.

"It's a scheme with no losers. There's a chunk of money to help developers such as myself as banks aren't willing to lend on refurbishments as it's too risky. But the council steps in and it enables you to at least start the work – get some flats done, sell them, repay the loan and liberate the funds to complete the next stage.

"It's a catalyst for regeneration."

No Use Empty marked its tenth anniversary last year, but has perhaps never been more essential to the county's economic mix – especially in times of such austerity.

Initially a pilot project for east Kent, it went countywide in 2008 and has never looked back.

Explains Steve Grimshaw, KCC's programme manager and the man who drives NUE forward.

"We started," he explains, "with 9,000 long-term empty properties in the county, and over a 10 year period have reduced that by 40 per cent. Our aim is to hit 5,000 properties brought back into use by March of 2017.

"NUE is a partnership and we work with all our district councils. There's lots of training, advice and guidance we offer, plus, of course, have a successful loan fund – and a short-term secured loan.

"Initially they are interest free, but

Continued on page 22

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Continued from page 21

we've also done some interest-bearing ones."

Up to last month, 4,717 properties previously empty are now playing an active role in the community and local economy once again.

During its life span, NUE has approved £17.1m of interest-free loans, leveraging in excess of £23.3m of private sector funding through the contributions expected by the owners of the property. That's a total investment of some £40.4m which can all be credited to NUE's efforts.

Due dilligence is rigorous before any loan is approved and there are fixed repayment dates and expectations. In all, only one loan – of £50,000 – has ever defaulted. Fortunately interest generated on other loans has ensured no impact to the public purse.

Adds Mr Grimshaw: "If smaller developers failed to access money from banks – as securing loans is now so difficult – they have brought a project to us, and it might be they have had the benefit of a loan before from us for zero percent. We can try and sort a loan, but interest-bearing, and that helps cover our operational costs.

"Any one time we have £6-7m in the system. We have a great track record so far and in terms of the schedule of repayments we're ahead of ourselves.

"The maximum repayment terms are three years. The minute the project is developed sometimes the developer will go back to the bank and raise money against it and that triggers the loan repayment back to us.

"We don't advertise, all our referrals come from district and borough councils, or word of mouth.

"We have a limited amount of money and we're trying to spread it."

Even Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is in talks about getting involved in some capacity – dispelling the myth only the down-at-heel coastal towns are the focus of the work (see table).

But, as with all projects funded by County Hall, the spectre of the enormous budget cuts looms large.

Adds Mr Grimshaw: "We are keeping fingers crossed budgets are ratified and our project will have a little more money in it going forward. We've already exhausted the fund going forward this financial year and have a waiting list."

Mark Dance is KCC cabinet member for economic development and, ultimately, oversees the NUE project.

He explains: "We run this scheme on the back of £500m cuts over the last five to six years. So we have to justify why we're doing this and not spending more on adult social services, for example.

"But I look after economic drivers and if we didn't do NUE we wouldn't be doing anything. We are as slim as we can be to make a difference, anything less, we might as well shut up shop."

He hopes to see NUE continue to expand – with ambitions to push the project more and more to embrace commercial properties and shops on our high streets.

"Where you have a big glassy high street with very few traders," Cllr Dance explains, "if every third property or every other property was decent quality housing you'd break it up and give life to the high street. There's movement 24 hours. They would be vibrant again.

"Across Kent we've put a lot of money into foreign direct investment, from elsewhere in the country, from London, and we're very short of good quality commercial properties.

"In the Kent Property Market Review, Locate in Kent said two years ago they had 1,450 properties and now we have 900 and a lot of those are rubbish.

"So with this scheme there is something we can do with those properties.

"What's often forgotten is the people behind the scenes – the small family builders. They would not be getting loans from banks to do up

properties, because banks are frightened to lend. So by taking these chunks of money, from us in the form of a loan, they're able to do that property up and keep their business rolling and their people employed."

He uses as an example a recent development in Maidstone which saw a former office block transformed into much-needed accommodation for adults with learning difficulties; alleviating at least a little of the strain experienced by other parts of KCC.

"No one wants an empty house in the street they live," Cllr Dance adds, "or high streets with not a lot of take-up from traders and there are things we can do there. So it's multi role. But predominantly its for areas of deprivation, mainly coastal, where we can give it a bit of a lift."

Touring a selection of properties in and around Folkestone – Shepway is one district council which has dug into its own pocket to provide a valuable 'top up' loan to help boost work in the area – it is remarkable the difference it can make.

We visit a former funeral directors at the end of the once notorious Tontine Street – an area which has long since seen the benefits of rejuvenation caused, much in part, by the Creative Quarter which has brought a theatre and galleries to the area.

Solini Court has been transformed into 11 affordable homes by local developer Paul Berardo. Having received money from both KCC and Shepway via NUE, the cash was loaned on condition of affordable rents, 80 per cent of market rent, and managed by a registered provider – in this case Amicus Horizon – for five years.

The apartments are already being gobbled up and, unsurprisingly, this is now a piece of prime residential land; close to the town, facilities and harbour.

Adds KCC's Steve Grimshaw: "NUE was initially about bringing residential back to residential. In the last few years we have seen larger properties come forward to us – these can be anything from pubs, churches, warehouses anything which has surpassed its shelf life and has planning permission for residential. We try to bring forward projects of that nature."

Then its off to a former care home in Cheriton Road which is currently still a construction site but will, ultimately, become nine self-contained

WHICH DISTRICTS HAVE BENEFITED FROM NUE LOANS?

Ashford - £380,000
Canterbury - £550,000
Dartford - £626,000
Dover - £4.29m
Gravesham - £75,000
Maidstone - £525,000
Sevenoaks - £529,000
Shepway - £3.47m
Swale - £980,000
Thanet - £5.03m
Tonbridge & Malling - £295,000
Tunbridge Wells - £327,000

TRANSFORMED: Marine Parade was once a building site, left, having long been abandoned - now it's a desirable series of apartments on the market

A NUMBERS GAME

£48,000 average cost to renovate a unit in the worst condition

£21,700 average KCC investment per unit (excludes affordable home project)

£1,900 actual cost to KCC per unit (loss of interest and management costs)

£8.7m repayment of loans to date

1,738 people who have found homes through the scheme

754 jobs created through the loan scheme

£20 amount spent in local economy on labour and materials for each £1 spent on interest and administration

flats in a building left empty for more than six years.

In an environment where the clamour for housing is deafening, commonsense would suggest ensuring existing buildings which are already standing are being utilised should be priority – if for no other reason than promoting community cohesion and the far smaller costs involved compared to new build.

Helen Williams is chief executive of the national charity Empty Homes – an organisation devoted to promoting the transformation of empty properties. She is anxious that following the end of previous schemes, the government is not doing enough to allow more empty homes to be brought back into use.

She explained to KoS: "Local authorities have tough decisions to make about where to spend their money.

"Under the previous government there was a dedicated empty homes programme and under those, local authorities, charities and housing associations could bid for money to allow them to buy, refurbish and bring back into use empty buildings.

"With the ending of those programmes, the level of work that can be done has reduced.

"We would like the reinstatement of those dedicated programmes to ensure that sufficient investment goes into creating more affordable homes in empty properties alongside new homes.

"Kent is an example of how local authorities come together and get things done.

"The Kent scheme is a joint project across the county, with the backing of the county, and that's what distinguishes it.

"There are other loan schemes in the country, but it's the fact it's across council boundaries that makes it different."

For Steve Grimshaw, the progress is heartening.

He concludes: "Everyone sees the merits of it. We have had national recognition, the Welsh government based their loan fund on our model, I've just been in Scotland for talks on their plans and lots of other councils are coming to us for advice and the training we provide.

"This is a Kent baby and is the longest running empty property scheme in the county. And unique as the housing authority is the lead. Everyone wins."

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STEAM: The Kent & East Sussex Railway is part of county's offering. Picture: Lewis Brockway

Heritage rail is on track for big tourism surge

By Chris Murphy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

SEVEN months after the government revealed it will hand over £75,000 to boost the county's heritage railways, the project has been officially launched.

Dignitaries gathered on Friday at the East Kent Railway Trust at Eythorne Station near Dover, to reveal plans to tie all five of the rail networks together, if only virtually.

Kent won the maximum amount available.

The idea is to boost national awareness of just what the county has to offer in terms of historic railway lines that are still running thanks to the undying dedication of those behind them – many volunteers.

The lines are East Kent Railway; Kent and East Sussex Railway; Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway; Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway; and Spa Valley Railway.

Representatives from all the heritage lines helped with the launch conducted by Mark Dance, the economic development cabinet member on Kent County Council and Sandra Matthews-Marsh, chief executive of Visit Kent – the county's tourism champions.

She told the gathering: "We are delighted Kent won this funding which means we can now launch this exciting project championing our county's rich rail heritage.

"Kent not only has five fantastic heritage railways welcoming visitors, but we are also home to Hornby Hobbies. In addition, the county has the first new rail line built since the 1800s, with High Speed One, and possibly a new railway heritage museum, which is in its planning stages in Ashford.

"Each of Kent's heritage railways has a unique story to tell, and we look forward to celebrating and sharing these with more visitors."

Visit Kent also announced it is carrying out research to identify key groups and operators to drive footfall and bring all the heritage railways together under one umbrella.

That way each can collaborate, share best practice, cross-promote and work on future projects in an effort to ensure their longevity.

Kent was one of 17 successful bids around the UK.

At the time, the then rail minister Claire Perry said: "We want to show the best of British to our visitors, and heritage and community railways are part of that package."

Adding that it is part of the government's five-point plan to boost British tourism

The project will now create fresh opportunities for tourists from both home and abroad to access and enjoy the hidden gems of the country's heritage and community railways.

Visit Kent is to now help increase awareness of, and visits to, the heritage railways.

This will be achieved with dedicated marketing, public relations and social media campaigns, including a new digital platform for the network and presence in Visit Kent's London marketing campaign.

The campaign will also join 'the old and the new' by working with train firm Southeastern to improve awareness of the local heritage railways at the nearest mainline stations, including orientation and staff training.

Visit Kent said the launch event gave all stakeholders the chance to meet their project partners and discuss how best to proceed while spending the windfall cash wisely.

The project's funding was made available from the Department for Transport's heritage and community rail tourism innovation competition, which aimed to boost rail-related tourism across the country.

Kent and East Sussex Railways says it hopes the funding received by Visit Kent will increase visitor numbers to its line which stretches 10-and-a-half miles through scenic countryside from Tenterden to Bodiam.

Helen Douglas, its product and reservations manager, said: "There are plans to use the funding to improve awareness of heritage railways through additional marketing campaigns and promotions at mainline stations. We hope this will attract more visitors from London to the benefit of both the heritage railways as well as the local community."

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Established in 1997, AMS Workwear prides itself on its customer service, meaning you can come in and talk to friendly members of staff who will strive to deliver exactly what is needed for your business equipment or, if you prefer, funny t-shirts for stag and hen parties. Its one-to-one service is something of a unique selling point for AMS Workwear, and what sets it apart from other businesses in the workwear market.

AMS Workwear has supplied to Medway Council and the Medway Maritime Hospital for more than four years, as well as a number of firms - both large and small.

Mid-Kent College have also been supplied since 2012, going from four departments to now supplying over 20 across Medway and Maidstone campuses.

No order is too large or too small for AMS Workwear - it has previously provided equipment for small businesses popping into the store, or massive orders of 3,000 for local colleges wanting to get students fully kitted out - either way, catering for your needs is not a problem.

Similarly, there are no limits to the type of stock that AMS Workwear can deliver, as it works with a number of big suppliers like Dickies, Regatta, Portwest, Brook Taverner and Uneek,to ensure your workwear needs can be met.

Manager Colin Gentle said: "We supply well-respected organisations who are dependant on the service we offer. Customers can come to us confident that we know what we're talking about and we can be trusted to deliver exactly what they need."

EQUIPMENT: A range of workwear is available in store

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Hythe Brasserie - something fresh, fun and a little different

Situated on a sunny corner just off Hythe High Street, Hythe Brasserie offers classical cuisine with a contemporary twist.

Personally managed by husband and wife team Nicki and Darragh Cartmill, the brasserie's reputation is well established and is always bustling with local clientele as well as tourists flocking to the seaside town in the summertime.

With a fresh fish catch every weekend and locally sourced produce, Hythe Brasserie serves its dishes with only the finest ingredients and changes its menus seasonally. All homemade and cooked from scratch, your food will be served in a warm, cosy intimate environment complimented by a first-class, fuss free service with a personal touch.

Signature dishes include tempura monkfish with a hot and sour dip on the side and crab tart glazed with hollandaise sauce. This year's December evening menu offers staple favourites with an imaginative twist, with mains including maple roasted pork belly with whiskey sauce, sticky beef short ribs and roast turkey breast with a bacon and herb stuffing. For something sweet, try the amaretto cheesecake or light lemon and almond tart - the crunchy hot toffee meringue is a favourite with locals.

COSY: The Hythe Brasserie is located close to the Military Canal and a 10 minute walk from the seafront

It would be rude to not to compliment your dish with a glass of wine, and with a great house selection Hythe Brasserie is sure not to disappoint. Favourite wines from Kent are highlighted on the menu, and of course a few French classics - all reasonably priced.

Chef Darragh has been a chef for 30 years and makes his own soda bread daily. The restaurants he managed in Ireland have previously been awarded two AA rosettes, meaning you can expect your meal to be of only the highest quality.

Last but not least, Hythe Brasserie can be trusted to take your dietary requirements very seriously. From full blown allergies and intolerances, to preferred eating styles, Hythe Brasserie caters for all. Even better, you can be assured your dish will be prepared to the same high standard as the main menu.

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Stunning views of Thanet at Thorley Taverns' top outlets

Make the most of what Kentish seaside has to offer with a visit to one of Thorley Taverns unique, family-run outlets.

From fine dining to a cosy pub set in the heart of the community, Thorley Taverns is Thanet's leading leisure operator and has specialised in an array of quality pubs, bars, restaurants and hotels for over 40 years.

One of them is The Pegwell Bay in Ramsgate, a cliff-top hotel offering unrivalled views over the coast. The hotel has recently opened a £1million three-storey extension, which houses the brand new Seaview restaurant - perfect for a bite to eat overlooking the picturesque Pegwell Bay. As one of Kent's most unique wedding venues, The Pegwell Bay Hotel boasts an outside decking area with a stunning seaside gazebo - meaning you can exchange your vows just a few feet away from the water's edge.

Offering more spectacular views is the Captain Digby in Broadstairs, an award-winning family restaurant offering Great British home-cooked food and fine wine overlooking Kingsgate Bay.

RELAX: Thorley Taverns offers an array of bars, eateries and hotels dotted along the Kentish coast

For entertainment, visit the Queen's Head - Ramsgate seafront's number one live music and sports bar - where friendly staff are on hand to serve a wide range of continental beers and cask marque approved real ales. Live music is played every weekend, providing a perfect excuse to grab yourself a drink and unwind on the edge of Ramsgate Harbour.

If you're visiting the Turner Contemporary, be sure to pop to Barncales - a seaside pub just a stone's throw away from the art gallery.

And for those looking for fine dining, the historic Tartar Frigate in Broadstairs houses one of the best seafood restaurants in Kent. As one of the only 18th century flint restaurants in the county, the Harbour restaurant boasts stunning panoramic views over Viking Bay.

With the first pub opening in 1971, the family-run business has grown massively over the years. But amid many changes, three generations of family continue to offer a warm welcome to anyone who walks through their doors in the county.

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A trustworthy guide to buying a motorcycle in Canterbury

Robinsons Foundry is a family run motorcycle dealer located in Canterbury. First starting up in Broadstairs, the business acquired a Suzuki franchise in the 1970s - beginning the journey to becoming one of the country's leading motorbikes suppliers.

As a franchise dealer for leading brands including Suzuki, Moto Guzzi, Piaggio and Vespa, Robinsons Foundry has a large showroom where you can come and view new and used bikes, clothing and accessories and a service department with fully trained technicians.

With nearly half a century's worth of experience, the company's growth has continued year-on-year, as they now sell a broad range of some of the best motorbikes money can buy - as well as the more affordable.

Staying true to its Kentish roots, Robinsons Foundry moved to its current Broad Oak Road home in 1990 - the old Canterbury Foundry premises. The name of the Foundry was chosen as it seemed suitable to the new heavy metal brand of Harley Davidson and the building had been used as a foundry before.

In 2010 the company's business strategy changed and Robinsons Foundry parted ways with Harley Davidson. This has now opened the door for some exciting new Brands including Victory American Motorcycles, Indian and Aprilia.

Popular bikes include the Indian Scout Sixty motorcycle, with a modern, light chassis, a liquid cooled V-Twin engine and five-speed gearbox.

The company always keeps up to date with the latest bikes on the road, with new Suzuki and Aprilia models coming in early next year.

Some of the most up to date bikes already at the Canterbury showroom include the Suzuki Intruder M1800R, with an advanced chassis built for effortless cruising across town and an unmatched combination of the latest power-cruiser technology.

There is also a range of used bikes on offer at a range of affordable prices to help support anyone looking to get on board a bike.

It can offer an experienced, knowledgeable and trustworthy guide to buying a motorbike, and offers a range of parts and merchandise.

EXPERIENCE: Robinsons Foundry has been operating since the sixties

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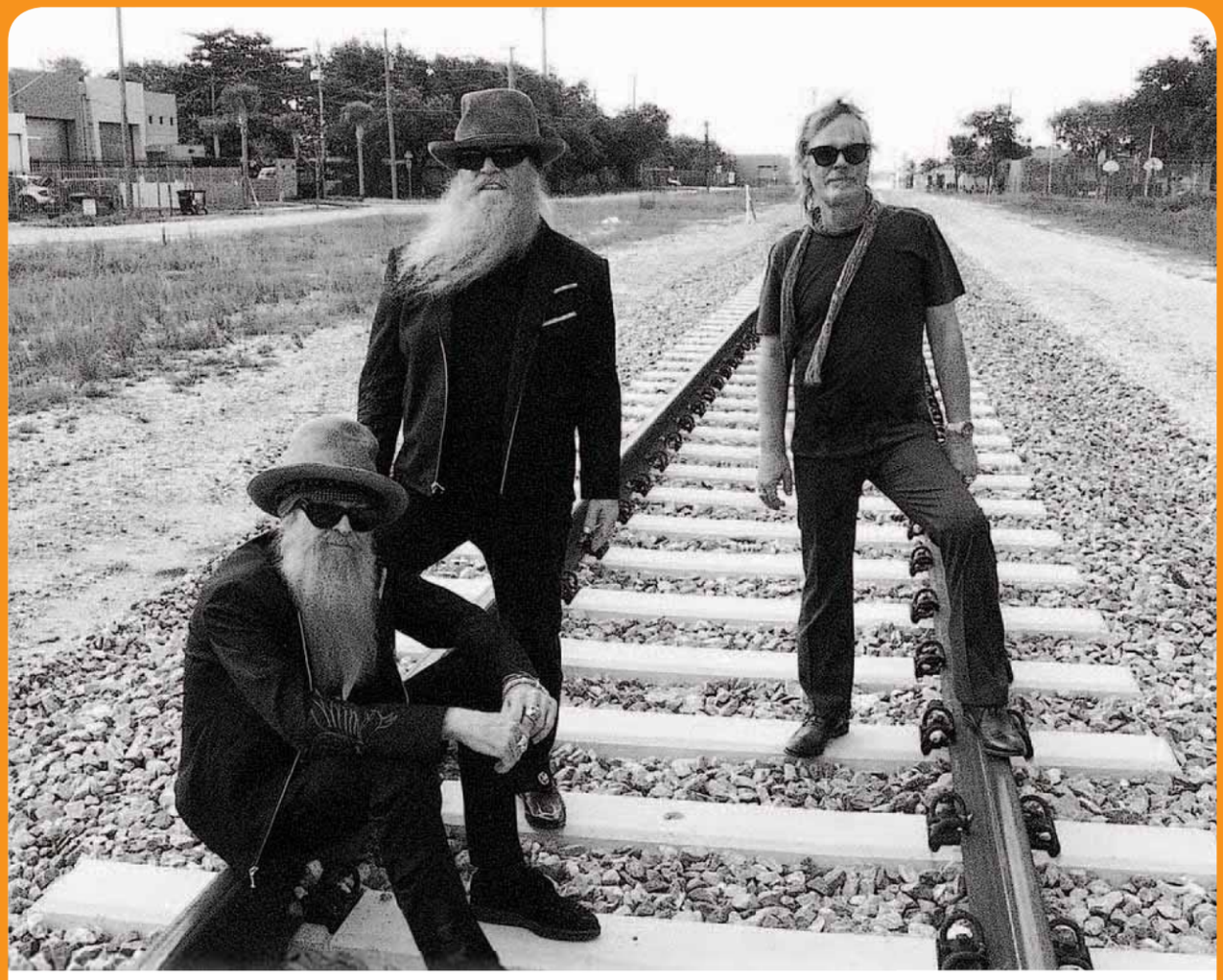

HALL OF FAME: ZZ Top are rock legends after being inducted into the Rock 'N' Roll Hall of Fame in 2004

ZZ Top announced as 2017 Ramblin' Man Fair headliner

The festival's director says he can guarantee event will hit rock fans' sweet spot...

FOLLOWING on from the critically acclaimed and commercially successful second year in 2016, Ramblin' Man returns in 2017.

Ramblin' Man Fair has announced the first bands confirmed for the event. These include ZZ Top (main stage headliner/UK festival exclusive), Monster Truck, Jared James Nichols, Kansas (Prog in the Park stage headliner), Magnum, Joanne Shaw Taylor (Blues stage headliner), The Quireboys (performing an exclusive Blues set), Big Boy Bloater and Dan Baird and Homemade Sin (Outlaw Country stage).

Festival director Chris Ingham commented on this year saying: "Last year's Ramblin' Man Fair was a huge success in all areas. We were overwhelmed by the great spirit and general bonhomie of the crowd as the sun shone brightly, the ale poured freely and the bands played on.

"We welcome all the past ramblers back to Mote Park for 2017 as much as we look forward to welcoming the new friends who have heard just how much fun our special little festival has become.

"We promised that we would up the ante for 2017 and the team at RMF HQ can guarantee that the bill that has been assembled will hit every lifelong rock fan's sweet spot! This is but the first round of announcements – stay tuned for more transmissions."

ZZ Top are one of rock music's most recognisable and well-loved acts. Formed in Texas in 1969, the band have kept their classic lineup of Dusty Hill, Billy Gibbons and Frank Beard for more than 45 years.

Since their debut album in 1971 the band have gone on to sell over 50 million albums. Inducted into the Rock 'N' Roll Hall Of Fame in 2004 the band's 1983 Eliminator album has sold more than 10 million copies alone and delivered hits such as Gimme All Your Lovin', Sharp Dressed Man, and Legs.

Another headliner, British blues rock guitarist and singer Joanne Shaw Taylor was discovered by Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics at the age of 16. In 2010 and 2011 she won the Best Female Vocalist at the British Blues Awards, in addition to the Songwriter of the Year award in 2011. After hearing her play lead guitar with Annie Lennox's band at the Diamond Jubilee Concert, the legend Stevie Wonder said he loved her "clean, bluesy, understated tone".

The Quireboys, who are headlining the Blues Stage, have toured with The Rolling Stones, and Guns N' Roses.

The band's guitarist Guy Griffin said: "It's gonna be a rock 'n' roll rhythm 'n' blues set... things that we like and grew up with. We can't wait, we're talking and arguing about which songs to play but definitely no Stormy Mondays or Mustang Sally's, a real first for the QB's."

The festival will take place at Mote Park in Maidstone. The park has more than 450 acres of mature parkland and a 30-acre lake. With multiple travel links via train (Ashford International, Maidstone East and Maidstone West.

Weekend tickets are now on sale at ramblinmanfair17.eventbrite.co.uk. Weekend general admission is £150, and weekend VIP tickets are £250. Both ticket prices are subject to a booking fee.

» Email us details of your event to:
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk
Tel: 01233 653476

Follow us @KOSMedia or www.kentnews.co.uk/leisure

New building for Ashford symbolises a new start

It has been a busy year for the Hadlow Group, recently named Top Public Sector Company at The Institute for Turnaround Awards. Rapid progress is being made on phase one of its new-build Ashford College campus, due to open in September 2017, with a topping-out ceremony held earlier this year. The £26m, 7,135m² campus is one of Ashford's 'Big 8' projects, set to regenerate the centre of the town.

Damian Green, Conservative MP for Ashford, said of the project: "The building symbolises a new start for Ashford, and a new chance for thousands of young people to gain excellent qualifications which will help them start their working lives with confidence."

One of the College's students is experiencing the build first-hand. David Steptoe, 19, is the apprentice site manager for the contractor, BAM Construction. He works on site four days a week, then spends one day studying for his BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment.

He explains how he came to be involved in the project: "I was always interested in work where I could see a physical product, had done my Carpentry & Joinery Diploma Level 1 and actually applied for a carpentry apprenticeship. During my application, I was informed that I had the right grades for the BAM apprentice role - I was keen to get involved and started my apprenticeship with them at 18."

"Although I'm the apprentice, the site team have genuinely made me feel like a valid team member. Many of them were students at Ashford College and have commented on the good reputation of their apprenticeship scheme.

"Once I've finished my BTEC Level 3, I plan to do a Construction HNC at Ashford then go to university to do an HND. I then hope to get some experience as a site manager for 5 years, at which point I can progress to being a project manager."

David's involvement serves to highlight the Hadlow Group's dedication to sustaining a culture that empowers everyone, putting learners at the core of what they do.

Looking ahead to 2017, the Group will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of Hadlow College and also opening the £8m visitor centre at its Betteshanger Parks project - housing the Kent Mining Museum, green energy and cycle centres, restaurant and conference facilities.

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BBC's Young Chorister joins Christmas Snowman concert

By Emily King

emily.king@archant.co.uk

AFTER the success of last year's family concert, the National Concert Band Champions will once again be performing Howard Blake's music from The Snowman. But this time they are doing so live to accompany a screening of Raymond Briggs' magical animated film.

What's more, the Maidstone Wind Symphony have announced they will be joined by the newly-crowned BBC Young Chorister of the Year Edward Hyde for the Walking in the Air solo.

Edward, from Sittingbourne, beat thousands of boys and girls across the UK to scoop the title of BBC Radio 2 Young Chorister of the Year.

A pupil at King's School, Rochester, the 12-year-old has apparently already landed radio and TV appearances and recording deals after receiving the accolade from broadcaster Diane Louise Jordan.

His rendition of I Vow to Thee My Country and Be Thou My Vision overwhelmed the judges at the finals at Manchester Cathedral on October 28.

Originally published in 1978, The Snowman, created and illustrated by Raymond Briggs, has become one of the world's most popular children's books selling in excess of eight-and-a-half million copies worldwide and being translated into more than 15 languages.

The Snowman isn't the only family favourite on the programme.

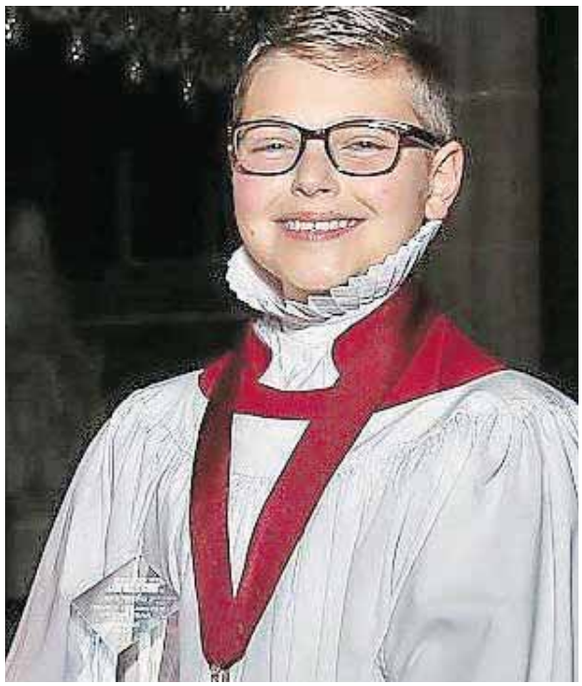
The orchestra will also be performing The Nutcracker Suite by Tchaikovsky, along with other festive pieces including Troika, Sleigh Ride and A Christmas Festival.

Prior to the concert, orchestra members will be offering free children's craft activities and instrument have-a-go sessions from 2.45pm ahead of the concert at 3.30pm.

The concert takes place at All Saints Church, Mill Street, Maidstone, on Sunday, December 18.

Admission is free for under 12s. For those attending with young children there is also an option to purchase a half-concert only ticket.

For details, visit boxoffice@maidstonewindsymphony.org



WINNER: Edward Hyde, 12, will sing the Walking in the Air solo at the concert at All Saints Church, Maidstone, on December 18.

Create Festival confirmed

ASHFORD'S popular Create Festival has confirmed it will return for 2017.

The event will be staged on July 22 at Victoria Park.

Last year, 12,000 enjoyed music across four stages.

Vicar's Picnic will be back

VICAR'S Picnic festival will be back in 2017.

Organisers have announced the festival will take place again next year on July 14 and 15.

Headliners at the event in Yalding will likely be renowned artists, with past acts including Reef and Mark Morris of the Bluetones.

For tickets, visit vicarspicnic.co.uk

Senitio Christmas concert

JOSÉ Senitio is presenting 300 years of the piano with a Christmas concert.

He promises to play Christmas carols, and pop.

The concert is on December 15 at Bromley URC.

Renovated market opens

GRAVESEND Borough Market opened for business on December 3.

Finishing touches will be added in early 2017 with a Market Café but at the moment it hosts the annual Christmas Market, as part of Gravesend Borough Council's 'Merry Christmas Everyone' events programme.

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GEEK gaming event 2017

GAMING event GEEK is coming to Margate's Dreamland from February 17-19, 2017.

A highlight will be a tournament for the 25th year of Mario Kart.

Tickets are now on sale.

Ashford Fringe Festival

ASHFORD Fringe Festival is running its third annual event from May 20-28, 2017.

This year there's to be a Choir Festival and a Folly Stage with wonderfully eclectic music acts on the bandstand. Independent film and comedy nights are returning, featuring award-winning, well-known acts.

Out of Order comedy

SHAUN Williamson (EastEnders) and Sue Holderness (Only Fools & Horses) join Out of Order at Dartford's Orchard Theatre from January 2-7 2017.

For tickets, visit orchardtheatre.co.uk

The Matt Monro Show

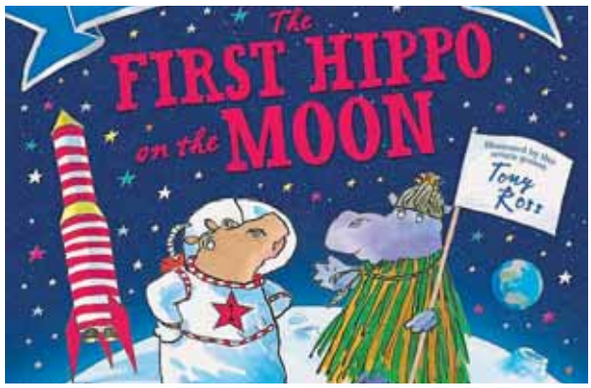
THE Matt Monro Show is coming to Bromley's Churchill Theatre on February 24, Maidstone's Hazlitt Theatre on March 9, and Folkestone's Leas Cliff Hall on April 29.

Mr Monro was the first singer ever to sing on a James Bond film (From Russia With Love).

For tickets, visit ticketmaster.co.uk

Walliams and The First Hippo on the Moon

By Emily King
emily.king@archant.co.uk



A STAGE adaptation of David Walliams' The First Hippo on the Moon will be coming to Dartford's Orchard Theatre from January 29 to February 1, 2017, and Gravesend's Woodville Theatre on April 21, 2017.

Suitable for children aged three and up, casting for The First Hippo on the Moon will be announced in due course.

Mr Walliams said: "I am delighted that The First Hippo on the Moon will be making its world premiere this December at the historic Eastbourne Hippodrome before travelling up and down the UK. I've been a long-time admirer of Les Petits Theatre Company and the innovative approach they take to theatre-making so I'm excited to see how they bring my hippo space explorers to life on stage."

Les Petits Theatre Company, said: "We are excited to be bringing David Walliams' space race adventure to life for young audiences with our trademark mixture of larger than life puppets, fun, live music and adventure. We are delighted to be premiering the first stage adaption of David Walliams' picture books for young readers, and to be working with an author who we have long admired for his boundless imagination and great sense of fun."

Based on David Walliams' original children's book with illustrations by Tony Ross, The First Hippo on the Moon is an explosively funny space adventure which sees the enormously rich Hercules Waldorf-Franklin III and ingenious Shelia compete to be the first hippo to make it to the moon.

Mr Walliams has taken the literary world by storm and his brilliantly funny stories are adored by children the world over. He has achieved unprecedented critical acclaim and quickly developed a reputation as a natural successor to Roald Dahl. His books have been translated into over 45 languages.

For tickets, visit orchardtheatre.co.uk, or woodville.seatlive.com

DELIGHTED: David Walliams

FUNNY: This is the second of his books being taken to the stage

'Festive food is better with little ones,' says Aikens

Tom Aikens tells of fondness for Christmas baking with his little ones, and how to avoid meltdown...

He's a perfectionist chef with a chain of restaurants to his name, but in Tom Aikens' kitchen at home, someone else in charge – two little people, to be precise.

His daughters, Josephine, five, and three-year-old Violette, like to help Dad out with cooking – peeling, mixing, and "oh my God, making such a mess".

This Christmas, Aikens is looking forward to some family festive baking.

"I'm sure they're going to get their hands dirty with making mince pies and things like that," says the 46-year-old. "It's nice they're at an age where they can get involved, and they really like it as well."

The Norfolk-raised chef loves almost everything about Christmas with his brood - "all the food and unwrapping presents is so much nicer with little ones, and they understand about Father Christmas now" – but one thing he's less looking forward to is hearing Let It Go, from Disney's Frozen, on repeat over the holidays.

"It's always about Frozen. It's appalling," he says with a sigh.

"Let It Go is sung every day. Every. Day... They're probably going to bring out another one soon, so we'll have it all over again."

It's been a busy year for Aikens, who at 26, became the youngest British chef to be awarded two Michelin stars.

Last month, he opened up a Tom's Kitchen Deli in Dubai, and in December the chain (which has five sites across London, plus an international flagship in Istanbul), will open its first UK site outside the capital, in Birmingham.

PERFECTIONIST: Tom Aikens

Little wonder he's looking forward to seeing friends and family, and "getting out of the chaos of London" this Christmas.

At home, he will probably cook goose, duck or ham - and turkey, with mulled wine ("I get through a fair bit of that") and port on the drink's menu.

To avoid a Christmas cooking meltdown, he recommends getting as much done in advance as possible, and preparing things like vegetables, chipolatas, bread sauce and cranberry sauce the day before.

"Even roast potatoes, you can get them done in the morning so you just reheat them, to make life a little easier," he advises.

"I brine my turkey first and leave it out the night before, so it's at room temperature and I know it's going to cook evenly. Then when I get out of bed - I put it in the oven straight away and cook it really, really slowly, so when it comes to lunchtime, you've got a really nice moist turkey that's not going to be dry and overcooked."

He says he isn't "regimented" about having turkey on the menu, however.

"As a chef, I don't want to always do the same thing at Christmas, and it's nice to do something different.

"But I will always have Christmas pudding," Aikens adds. "That's the one thing I won't ever change."

The Damned cancel

FANS of punk legends The Damned were 'devastated' on Friday as it was announced that their Margate tour date, had been cancelled because of illness.

All ticket-holders have been notified by the venue, and the concert is due to be rescheduled, hopefully, before Christmas.

Fans have been asked to keep an eye on the band's website www.officialdamned.com and band-related social media.

Charity show for Kelly

BRAVE Kelly Turner, 16, from Dover is suffering from a rare form of Cancer known as Desmoplastic Small Round Cell Tumor. She has been given one year to live if she doesn't get to America for treatment.

A concert called Bobby Socks and Blue Jeans at Folkestone's Leas Cliff Hall on December 11 will give all proceeds to Kelly.

Tickets cost £20. Visit www.facebook.com/getkellytotheus for more information.

Chris Ramsey tour

FUNNY man Chris Ramsey is bringing his Tickets For Is That... Chris Ramsey? to Dartford's Orchard Theatre on March 4, 2017.

The comedian is best known for performances at The Royal Variety Performance, on Celebrity Juice, and Live At The Apollo, and also for being wrongly arrested in a hotel in his underpants.

For tickets, visit orchardtheatre.co.uk

T Rex tribute on stage

T REXTASY have been performing all over the world for 25 years, a career that ironically out-lives Marc Bolan's very own T Rex.

On January 14, the show is coming to Tunbridge Wells' Assembly Hall to transport audiences back to the '70s for the Marc Bolan 40th commemorative anniversary tour.

The concert showcases all of the T Rex hits.

For tickets, visit assemblyhalltheatre.co.uk

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Get in the festive spirit

Christmas feel-good events in Ashford town

THE Christmas season is in full swing in Ashford, with events all across the town centre, and even free parking.

Ashford Borough Council have rolled out free town centre parking throughout the month of December. Car parks included in the offer are Edinburgh Road multi-story (Sundays and bank holidays), Flour Mills (Sundays and bank holidays), Edinburgh Road car park (after 3pm everyday, Monday to Saturday), and Station Road (after 3pm).

And the County Square Shopping Centre is hosting a number of events to make your Christmas memorable.

On December 11, Ashford Sings choir will be performing a selection of Christmas carols with the hope that audiences will join in. The fun begins at noon and again at 1.30pm.

But the entertainment doesn't stop there. On December 17, a giant reindeer and his herder will be in the shopping centre entertaining kids and gearing them up for Santa's arrival. Visitors can see the reindeer in 30 minute slots between 11.30pm and 4pm.

The Salvation Army will also be collecting in the centre all day on December 17.

Meanwhile a delightful treat of magical experiences for young and old alike will be at The Reindeer Centre at Bethersden. Revel in the Christmas spirit while you walk through seven beautiful animated scenes.

Every adult and child will have their own personal encounter with Father Christmas and every good child will receive a gift.

Christmas Recycling & Refuse Collections 2016/17

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	Tue 3 Jan	Thurs 5 Jan
	Wed 4 Jan	Fri 6 Jan
	Thurs 5 Jan	Sat 7 Jan
	Fri 6 Jan	Mon 9 Jan
RECYCLING	Mon 9 Jan	Tues 10 Jan
	Tues 10 Jan	Wed 11 Jan
	Wed 11 Jan	Thurs 12 Jan
	Thurs 12 Jan	Fri 13 Jan
	Fri 13 Jan	Sat 14 Jan

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For more information visit:
www.ashford.gov.uk/christmas-collection-dates

Don't miss out on Dartford's magical festivities

DARTFORD is gearing up for Christmas with a whole host of festive events spreading the good cheer.

The Orchard Theatre is boasting a Snow White panto that's 'bigger and better than ever' starring big name stage stars such as Joe Pasquale and Dame Ceri Dupree until January 2.

But the Christmas fun doesn't end there, as they're also hosting an adult-only panto in the new year. Catch the alternative to the family pantomime, where the traditional story will be packed with corny jokes, raunchy plots and blatant sexual innuendo for adults only.

Once again Dartford Borough Council is inviting residents to its wonderful annual carol concert in Central Park.

Since it launched in 2010, the outdoor carol concert has become a firm favourite and a great way to help everyone recharge their batteries in the final busy days before Christmas.

The celebratory concert features the Dartford and Gravesham NHS Choir as a guest, fresh from their recent TV performance and launch of their Christmas single By Your Side.

While a Christmas market takes place on December 23 in the High Street, just in time to get your Christmas shopping sorted.

Every year the market has a wide variety of Christmas gifts, food, wrapping paper and accessories available at value-for-money prices – and this year is no different.

SINGALONG: The NHS Choir will be guests this year

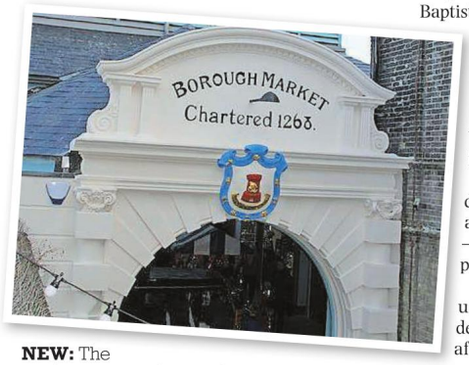
FAVOURITES: Stars take to stage. Oh yes they do!

Gravesend has a glorious Christmas offering

FESTIVE spirit is in abundance in Gravesend this year with heaps of Christmas activities for all ages.

With Gravesend Borough Market recently re-opening, the Christmas Market has expanded from the indoor market to the outside of the market in the Undercroft and on The Pier Square outside the Riva Restaurant and Pier, the Mug and Meeple and the Three Daws Pub.

The market's festivities don't stop there as there's an amazing Santa's Grotto in the garden of the Riva, where children can write and send their letters to Santa.



NEW: The market reopened recently

Meanwhile pop group Blue's Antony Costa is gracing the Woodville stage in its Jack and the Beanstalk pantomime. He'll be joined by Jaz Elington, from BBC1's The Voice, and Olivier Award winning West End performer Leanne Jones, as well as panto favourites Payne and Pearce, in this year's festive treat taking place from December 10 to January 2.

Live readings of Freya's Christmas Adventure, also at the theatre, will get two to six year olds excited in the days leading up to the big day from December 17 to 24.

And on Saturday (December 10) everyone is invited to a tree-mendous festival from 10.30am to 4pm at St George's Church, Emmanuel Baptist Church and the Blake Gallery.

The Christmas Tree Festival sees the venues taken over by tinsels, baubles and things even quirkier and more wonderful.

Go along and wander among the Yuletide creativity and vote for your favourite Christmas tree.

In total some 60 trees have been decorated – some quirky, some traditional, some modern and some really crafty – by local art groups, families and young people.

Public viewing and voting takes place until 2.30pm and the winners of the best decorated trees will be announced just after 3.30pm.

MARKET TOWN: Gravesend shoppers enjoy the festive stalls

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Get in the festive spirit

Folkestone's a winter wonderland this year

THIS winter Folkestone is offering visitors a very festive Christmas.

The Creative Quarter is hosting two late night shopping evenings for those who are stumped for gifts.

On December 15 and 22 the creative community of shops, fashion boutiques and curiosities will extend their opening hours until 7pm.

As well as fabulous shopping destination, the Creative Quarter also offers a plethora of food and drink options with Spanish, Mediterranean, veggie/vegan and Indian restaurants, a number of cosy cafés and two specialist beer and ale pubs.

The Creative Quarter also plans to dazzle and delight visitors with its annual Christmas Window Display Competition. The competition runs until December 16. Shops, businesses and cafés will be doing their best to wow passers-by with lights, art and more, creating jaw dropping festive displays to illuminate your day. You can vote for your favourite by visiting the Creative Quarter website.

A fantastically magical Santa's Grotto is coming to Bouverie Place on December 23, just in time for kids to pick up a gift before Christmas from the big man himself. The log cabin will be lit up with festive decorations, and elves will be spreading cheers while families wait in the queue.

From the creative team behind past pantomimes such as Cinderella and Aladdin, comes this year's pantomime spectacular at the Leas Cliff Hall.

The well-known tale gets the CT productions twist. Stunning costumes, amazing sets, special effects, song and dance numbers along with a script filled with jokes, crazy characters and audience participations ensure a pantomime season treat for the whole family.

Visit atgtickets.com for panto tickets. The show is on until January 7, 2017.

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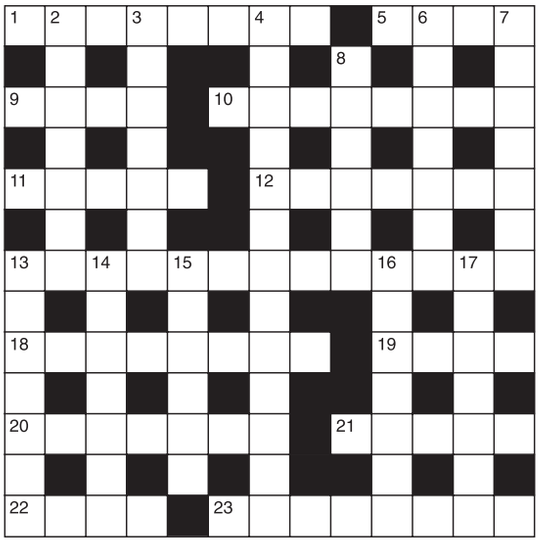
PUZZLES

DOUBLE CROSSWORD



Quick

Across

1. Manager (8)
5. Norway's capital (4)
9. Catalogue (4)
10. Belladonna (8)
11. Collier (5)
12. Contain (7)
13. Insomnia (13)
18. Thorough (8)
19. Cylinder (4)
20. Treachery (7)
21. Intellect (5)
22. Remark (4)
23. Perplex (8)

Down

2. Beginning (7)
3. Utmost (7)
4. Remote possibility (7,6)
6. Confiscation (7)
7. Unity (7)
8. Compels (6)
13. Curtail (7)
14. Implore (7)
15. Minister (6)
16. Innate (7)
17. Sink (7)

Cryptic

Across

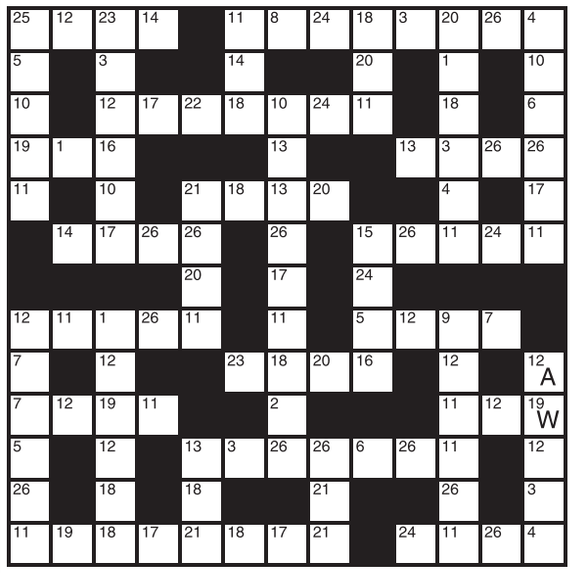
1. They get what's left (8)
5. Staunch supporter (4)
9. Muddle lands me on ship (4)
10. It may turn tail and still be aggressive (8)
11. Say it's complete (5)
12. Frank article written by G.B. Shaw (7)
13. Just one of twenty-four today (9,4)
18. Don't give someone all he deserves (8)
19. Garden pest - shoot it with an air gun (4)
20. Girl in public service? (7)
21. He may stand up for another's rights (5)
22. Double act, now extinct (4)
23. A fighting opponent (8)

Down

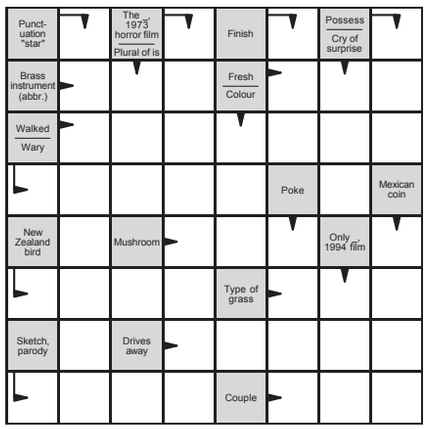
2. Chosen or chooser (7)
3. Rawness can produce the wrong ones (7)
4. A volume of information (13)
6. Four make an appearance in a trial of no importance (7)
7. Fellow with an appointment and a command (7)
8. Did some evening work, perhaps (6)
13. Beaten by one particular suit? (7)
14. Regulated as instructed (7)
15. Extend a banquet (6)
16. Prepare to sail away after the players (4,3)
17. They take great interest in your need for cash (7)

CODEWORD

This puzzle has no clues. Instead, every number printed in the grid represents a letter, with the same number always representing the same letter.
For example, if 8 turns out to be a V, you can write in V wherever a square contains 8. Using your knowledge of words, complete the puzzle.



Arrowword

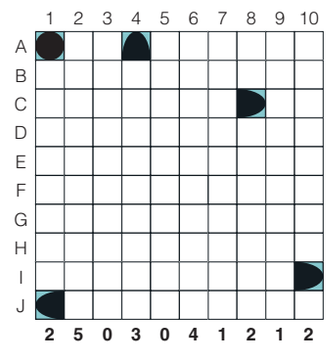


Enter your answers in the direction indicated by the arrows.

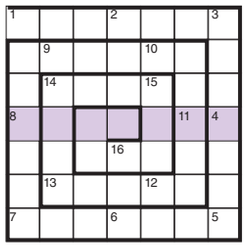
Battleships

Find where ships shown below are hidden in the grid. The numbers to the right of and below the grid indicate how many of the squares in that row are filled in with ships or parts of ships. The ships do not touch each other, even diagonally. Some of the squares have been filled to start you off.

THE FLEET
1 x Battleship
2 x Cruiser
3 x Destroyer
4 x Submarine



Word Spiral



Starting from 1, fill in the grid clockwise with four-letter words. The last letter of each word becomes the first letter of the next to reveal the key word in the shaded boxes.

1. Young cow
2. Insect
3. Prayer ending
4. Standard
5. Trading centre
6. Sepulchre
7. Group of countries
8. Deep sleep
9. Region
10. Singing voice
11. Unlock
12. Amphibian
13. Speak
14. Osculate
15. Male deer
16. Broad smile

Keyword clue: A former US president

SUDOKU

Hard

2		1		8				
						7		3
	4		6	3		1		
1			9				3	
			1		3			
	7				4			1
		9		1	6		5	
8		7						
				4		6		8

Easy

8		7				2		3
	9		7		2			4
			9			1		6
		2	8	1				
5	1		2		6		4	8
				5	4	7		
2		5			7		3	
7	4		5		3	6	8	1
6		1						

Solutions

Down: 2 Initial; 3 Extreme; 4 Outside chance; 6 Seizure; 7 Oneness; 8 Forces; 13 Shorten; 14 Enthrall; 15 Priest; 16 Natural; 17 Subside.

Codeword
1=H, 2=V, 3=R, 4=D, 5=L, 6=Z, 7=P, 8=Q, 9=M, 10=O, 11=S, 12=A, 13=F, 14=K, 15=J, 16=Y, 17=N, 18=I, 19=W, 20=T, 21=G, 22=X, 23=C, 24=U, 25=B, 26=E

Word Spiral
1 Calf; 2 Flea; 3 Amen; 4 Norm; 5 Mart; 6 Tomb; 7 Bloc; 8 Come; 9 Area; 10 Alto; 11 Open; 12 Newt; 13 Talk; 14 Kiss; 15 Stag; 16 Gin. **Keyword:** Clinton

Double Crossword
Across: 1 Legatees; 5 Stem; 9 Mess; 10 Scorpion; 11 Utter; 12 Candida; 13 Crossword clue; 18 Undergrey; 19 Slug; 20 Barmaid; 21 Boxer; 22 Dodo; 23 Pacifist. Down: 2 Electior; 3 Answers; 4 Encyclopaedia; 6 Trivial; 7 Mandate; 8 Ironed; 13 Clubbed; 14 Ordered; 15 Spread; 16 Cast off; 17 Usurers.

Quick
Across: 1 Director; 5 Oslo; 9 List; 10 Atropine; 11 Miner; 12 Include; 13 Sleeplessness; 18 Outright; 19 Tube; 20 Treason; 21 Brain; 22 Note; 23 Bewilder.
Down: 2 Chosen; 3 Rawness; 4 A volume; 6 Four; 7 Fellow; 8 Did; 13 Beaten; 14 Regulated; 15 Extend; 16 Prepare; 17 They.

Cryptic
Across: 1 They; 5 Staunch; 9 Mess; 10 Scorpion; 11 Utter; 12 Candida; 13 Crossword clue; 18 Undergrey; 19 Slug; 20 Barmaid; 21 Boxer; 22 Dodo; 23 Pacifist.
Down: 2 Electior; 3 Answers; 4 Encyclopaedia; 6 Trivial; 7 Mandate; 8 Ironed; 13 Clubbed; 14 Ordered; 15 Spread; 16 Cast off; 17 Usurers.

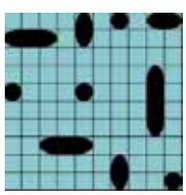
Sudoku - Hard

2	3	1	4	8	5	7	6	9
9	8	6	2	5	1	7	4	3
1	4	5	6	3	9	8	1	2
7	5	9	3	1	8	6	2	4
3	2	4	9	8	5	1	7	6
6	9	8	5	7	3	2	4	1
4	7	2	8	1	9	3	6	5
5	1	3	2	7	6	9	8	4
8	6	7	1	9	4	5	3	2

Sudoku - Easy

8	5	7	6	4	1	2	9	3
1	9	6	7	3	2	8	5	4
3	2	4	9	8	5	1	7	6
4	7	8	2	1	9	3	6	5
5	1	3	2	7	6	9	4	8
9	6	8	3	5	4	7	1	2
2	8	5	1	6	7	4	3	9
6	4	9	5	2	3	6	8	1
7	3	1	4	9	8	5	2	7

Battleships



Arrowword

O		A		E				A
	E		N		X	A	S	
N	E	W		D	O	R	T	
	K		Y	R	E	R	E	L
	P		E	C		R		
K	E	W	I		R	Y	I	K
	S		S	H	O	O	S	
S	K	I	T		D	U	D	O

It is Christmas Market heaven

Vienna is traditional, historic and has the best big wheel ever, says **Andrea Powell**

Vienna is a great city at any time of year. But the Christmas markets add a new dimension. Music and laughter, the smell of hot-roasted chestnuts and pretzels are all so festive. As for the mulled wine? Well, if we must!

With Christmas lights in the trees and gorgeous hand-painted handicrafts to browse, for my husband and me this was a wonderful start to the season. There is such a choice of stalls. The beautiful golden-lit Schoenbrunn Palace, the 'Magic of Advent' outside the City Hall, the Christmas Village at Maria-Theresien Platz... all wonderful.

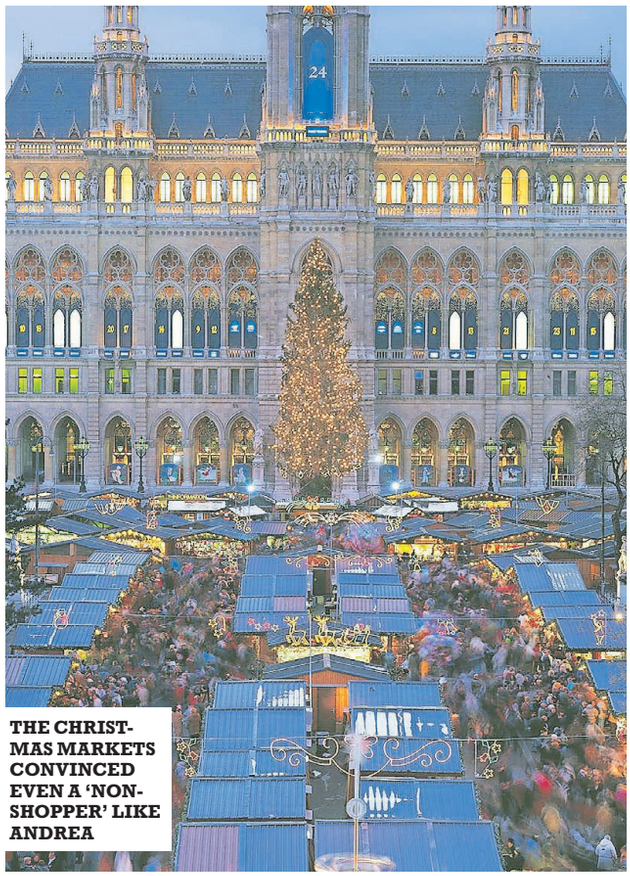
Having finished shopping, we decided to visit Prater. No visit is complete without the customary trip on the old Ferris Wheel. Built in 1897, this was never about white knuckles but far more about tradition, and a spectacular view from the top of course.

Despite only being in Vienna for two days, there was still time to take in some culture. We chose Schoenbrunn, with its fresco ceilings, crystal chandeliers, gilded ornaments and huge mirrors.

Getting around the city was easy with the tram far more fun than the hop on hop off bus. As for the horse drawn carriage city tour, yes it's expensive – but the anecdotes from our guide and driver as we took in the finest Viennese architecture made sure it was worth it.

I had hoped to see one of the shows at the Spanish Riding School but ran out of time. Good excuse for a return visit though.

Tucking into a traditional Viennese meal, Weiner Schnitzel at Figlmüller, we looked back on a wonderful break. I am really not a big shopper. In fact, I rarely set foot inside a shop whilst on a holiday. But this was different, and lovely.



THE CHRISTMAS MARKETS CONVINCED EVEN A 'NON-SHOPPER' LIKE ANDREA

How to get there

When to go
Although cold between December and March, the Christmas markets are a great reason to brave the weather in winter.

Vienna Christmas Market
For 2016 the Christmas Market runs until December 24. Stalls include:
* Viennese Christmas Market - in front of the City Hall
* Christmas Village Belvedere Palace
* Christmas Village Maria-Theresien Platz
* Christmas Village in the Former General Hospital
* Christmas Market at Spittelberg
* Christmas and New Year's Market at Schonbrunn Palace

Travel
Flights depart from Stansted, Luton and Gatwick via Ryanair, EasyJet and BA. The flight takes about two hours.

Where to stay
The ultimate in luxury is the Hotel Sacher Wien. A two night stay in December will cost from £485 pp based on two people sharing a double room, b&b. The Hotel Imperial is £405 pp for two nights, room only. If you want 5* at a lower price, the Ambassador Hotel costs £235 pp for a double room with breakfast or the Levante Parliament is £168 pp with breakfast. A bargain two night stay at the 4* Cordial Theatre Hotel will cost just £85 pp for a double room, room only.

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Redding's rant set the tone

Well, that was some rant [R Redding, KoS, letters, last week].

It was difficult to sort out his pro-Europe stance from everything else he managed to get in.

So, "getting our country back" does not mean the re-acquisition of utilities, though I believe that if this included state-ownership he/she would be for it; no, this means self-determination where an accountable parliament is paramount, not an unelected and unaccountable executive: national, not supra-national.

"Taking our jobs" is the rhetoric of a few extremists the like we see on the fringes of all political parties, though in the case of Labour the extremists have taken it over completely - a clear case of the lunatics taking over the asylum.

If he reads the news properly, he will see that seasonal workers for the agricultural industry is on the agenda - it always was. This has historical precedent when workers were recruited on short-term visas from Commonwealth countries. Other occupations will be catered for too - nobody's going to throw the baby out with the bathwater; nobody's advocating wholesale repatriation - this is the language of demagogues, and we are a tolerant and inclusive nation.

The writer then seems to move up a gear taking everything in, in a vast sweeping tirade about prisons, the elderly, housing and, finally, the NHS, before settling on the comfort blanket of trade unions.

The NHS cannot continue as it is because it's a broken model; what was right for the 1950s is no longer appropriate for the 21st century, and pouring vast amounts of further money into this bottomless pit is not the answer.

Likewise, much of what we see and read about trade unions lead one to believe that they, too, are trapped in the warm nostalgic glow of their own past, whilst currently exercising a disproportionate amount of power and disruption over the lives of the very same working men and women they claim to represent. Time to move into the modern age. And, returning to the EU referendum, the vote was to leave; we're leaving, time to move on.

Edward Baker,
Tunbridge Wells

Let's not fiddle figures of result

ONCE again readers have been subjected to another 'remainer', R Redding, telling those of us who voted to leave the EU that we didn't know what we were doing. That we are the ignorant ones incapable of thinking for ourselves, conned by the right wing press and so on.

I do not read any newspapers, except KoS and the Metro, both of which I receive online. I made up my own mind about which way I wanted to vote. I was not influenced by the so called 'lie' on the red bus.

Like many other remainers he's still presenting 'fiddled figures' to give the impression the UK didn't really vote to leave the EU, when the undeniable fact is the majority of those who actually voted, voted to leave. That is the only figure that matters.

He also peddles the 'old chestnut' the referendum was 'only advisory'. OK, let's assume that is correct. The majority who voted in the referendum 'advised' the government that we wanted to leave. The government has accepted that 'advice' and we're leaving. There, who hates it now Mr Redding?

Such is the arrogance of some politicians in the remain camp, they are prepared to engage in jerrymandering to subvert the government's efforts to negotiate the best possible deal for the UK.

Christopher Hudson-Gool,
Maidstone

LETTER OF THE WEEK

EU has been 'historic flop' so let's not worry

IN answer to R Redding in last week's paper, we do not have a spineless government; they are doing exactly what they were told to do by the electorate.

The referendum was not advisory, MPs voted to give the people a vote on our membership of the EU. If they read the government's leaflet, it states the government will abide by the will of the people, and that we will leave the single market; that is what our government is doing.

I am not a stupid man, I retired as a director of the fifth largest corporation in the world, and my reason for leaving the EU is for the future of my children and grandchildren so that they have a future in Great Britain.

The EU has been a historic flop, we joined a trading block and not a nationalistic bunch who want to have a super state called Europe, we are ruled by unelected bureaucrats. They have created a flawed currency that has crippled Greece and Italy, which shows you the kind of organisation it is.

I campaigned hard and put a great deal of my own money into the Vote Leave campaign and we won.

But now 11 millionaires are trying to thwart the will of the people. But it will not work. We are leaving and it will give us a great future in the world's marketplace.

Countries are lining up to trade with us once we leave and the EU will fall into place because they need us more than we need them, my prediction is that the EU will not exist in 10 years' time, it will collapse like a pack of cards so the sooner we get out the better.

What people like R Redding should remember is that 17.4m people voted out and if that is thwarted then hundreds of MPs will lose their seats at the next general election, because they are supposed to represent the views of their constituents and you could have a Ukip government and do they want that?

Michael Carr
Ashford

PM needs to step up her game

YOUR correspondent R Redding suggests that those of us who voted to leave the European Union have been sold a pup.

The truth is that the negotiations are being conducted very incompetently.

The government fails to recognise that the UK has the whip hand.

We are currently paying the EU hundreds of millions of pounds a week. England could manage on its own and save this expenditure.

Yet prime minister Theresa May is spending her time talking to financiers and overseas representatives, giving away large sums of taxpayers' money in return for effectively nothing.

What she does not do is listen to the views of ordinary electors in Kent or elsewhere in provincial England.

The government dreams that it can conduct fantastically complicated negotiations with Europe, but recent history shows that Europe finds it hard to agree on anything.

However much one might wish for a 'soft' exit, we have no alternative other than simply to leave and rely on worldwide trade and commerce agreements.

If Europe wishes to come to an agreement which is mutually beneficial, they will have to come to us with obviously favourable terms. The first thing they must agree is to negotiate on the basis of majority agreements rather than unanimity.

Withdrawing from the EU might cost Britain five per cent of our national income.

This could be more than offset if we took vigorous action to make our under-educated and self-serving managers and civil servants work effectively in the national interest.

Frederic Stansfield,
Ramsgate

Anger if decision is being blocked

READER R Redding says the referendum was 'advisory', well it is now.

In all the millions of words and hundreds of television hours before the vote, was the word 'advisory' ever used once?

It was clearly stated that it was a straightforward 'in' or 'out' vote.

That is why people are angry. Their democratically arrived decision has been given the two fingers by the establishment, who hold the normal people of this country in such disdain.

Terry Hudson,
Whitstable

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5) Have a sense of humour.
6) Have an easily understood division between news, comment and advertising.
7) Seek to celebrate as well as constructively criticise.
8) Highlight topical issues of concern to people living in the county.
9) Spotlight individual cases which raise broader concerns.
10) Champion causes that it feels are important to the well-being of the county and its people.

We hope you enjoy Kent on Sunday.

images of kent

Palm Bay, Cliftonville

by **Dennis Jackson from Cliftonville**

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ARCHANT

By Steve Loader
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

FUNCTION AND STYLE: The new Scenic now offers some panache to go with its versatility

Scenic attraction re-invented

FIRST DRIVE: Renault's original Scenic started as one of a kind, but was soon copied. Now it's been re-invented in style...

RENAULT invented people carriers (MPVs) and the original Scenic 1996 created the all-important C/MPV segment.

The French marque has now reinvented the type with the fourth generation Scenic (from £21,445); it's still a one-box design, but bolder and sportier – in short, an MPV you might buy for style as much as versatility.

Indeed, sitting on its 20-inch wheels – the standard size across the range – you might mistake the Scenic for a crossover which, along with the SUV, has chipped away once rampant MPV sales.

It also handles more tautly than before, though established Scenic buyers might lament how those big wheels now crash over road blemishes rather than smoothing them out.

The lineage is still clear though, once you examine the airy and well-organised cabin, with plenty of head and legroom in the standard car – the seven-seat Grand Scenic's extra pair of perches are a challenge for adults to access and get comfortable in.

Underfloor storage bins have been retained and there's a neat refinement to the versatility and arrangement of the rear seats on both five and seven-seat cars: all can be flopped fully flat individually or together with one touch from the cabin or a slave unit mounted in the boot – handy when wrestling something into the back.

There are two turbocharged 1.2-litre petrol options – 115hp and 130hp and both manual and there will be a mild hybrid diesel option in spring 2017, but I drove the likely best sellers, two diesels: a 110PS 1.5-litre and 130PS 1.6-litre, though there is also a 130PS 1.5-litre diesel auto.

The 110PS unit felt a bit underpowered, especially for a vehicle that, by design, is likely to spend a lot of its life well laden, but the 130 sounded more vocal so best take a test drive to decide.

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CAT AWARDS 2014

Mokka – now a much smoother brew

Vauxhall's crowd-pleasing crossover/SUV has grown-up, largely thanks to new engines to complement an affordable and well-made package says **Steve Loader**

Vauxhall Mokka X Elite 1.6 CDTi (136PS)

Price:	from £24,415
Driving appeal:	★★★
Image:	★★★★
Space:	★★★★
Value:	★★★★★
Running costs:	★★★★
How green?:	★★★★
Best rival:	Nissan Qashqai

ADMITTEDLY, I didn't much like the Vauxhall Mokka on arrival in 2012.

It didn't appeal in any particular area, the driving experience was lacklustre, and the powertrains were mostly tired.

But sales proved me wrong and the Mokka went on to become a UK top ten, up there with those long-term Vauxhall best sellers, the Astra family hatch and Corsa supermini.

To be fair though, my initial judgement wasn't all wrong: the Mokka remains a jack of all trades and master of none, but the brand has improved the driver enjoyment – notably with some new engines – and delivered a major facelift in October that made its functional body sleeker, added state of the art connectivity via Vauxhall's OnStar on board assistant, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, while also gaining an 'X' suffix.

And Vauxhall intends to follow up soon with two more X models to create a sub-brand to tempt those customers with an urban runabout/country life leaning.

Returning to the Mokka X, size is important: it sits nicely between cars like the Nissan Juke and Peugeot

2008, yet could be classed – at a stretch – with the bigger Qashqai, which started the crossover craze.

But if its size is a crowd pleaser, so is pricing from £17,640, which compares well with that for a family hatchback.

The car's muscular, compact body also has short overhangs allowing 4x4 versions (from £19,940) to deliver surprisingly good off-road ability, though a raised yet still modest ground clearance argues against serious yomping.

But most Mokka buyers opt for economy-minded front-wheel drive versions like the upspec Elite1.6CDTi 136PS (134bhp) diesel model tested here, and are happy to pilot this 'urban warrior' of a car around town.

This engine is good for 65.7mpg (official combined) but don't ignore petrol turbo options, which tend to be lighter and nicer to drive and more cost effective unless you are a tax conscious company car user chooser.

The Mokka X cabin retains the car's good height and legroom even if the back is cramped for three abreast.

Occupants do enjoy a high perch and good views out though, while everything feels sturdy and works well with trimming at the high standard now expected from Vauxhall, including lots of soft touch or padded plastic worthy of comparison with so-called premium brands.

However, the car's driving dynamics are still off the pace, with some leaning on the bends – perhaps the price for a well-damped and comfortable ride – though I was impressed with the power and refinement of the test car's 1.6-litre diesel engine.

Stowage in the cabin is good, with lots of family friendly cubby holes, while the 362-litre boot murders the smaller Juke's paltry 207 litres.

The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the All-New Renault Scénic range are: urban 37.7 (7.5)–67.39 (4.2); extra-urban 53.3 (5.3)–76.3 (3.7); combined 46.3 (6.1)–72.4 (3.9). The official CO_2 emissions are 136–100g/km. Figures are obtained for comparative purposes in accordance with EU Legislation and may not reflect real life driving results.

*Car shown is an All-New Scénic Signature Nav TCe 130 at £26,445 with optional metallic paint price £545. Prices shown are manufacturer's recommended retail prices, available on featured new vehicles ordered by 9 January 2017 and registered by 31 March 2017. Prices shown include delivery to dealer, number plates, 20% VAT, 12-month government road fund license and £55 first registration fee.

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LEGAL AND PUBLIC NOTICES

Notice of Cancellation of Registration
(Friendly Societies Act 1974 s.91)

Notice is hereby given that the Financial Conduct Authority has this day cancelled the registration of **Wainscott Institute** (Register No. **375 W**) the registered office of which is at **4 Wainscott Road, Wainscott ROCHESTER Kent ME2 4LB.** The grounds of the cancellation are that the society has wilfully violated section 43 of the Friendly Societies Act 1974 by not submitting to the Authority any annual returns acceptable for filing since that submitted for the society's financial year ending 31 December 2012.

The society ceases to be entitled to the privileges of a registered society, but without prejudice to any liability incurred by the society, which may be enforced against it as if such cancellation had not taken place.

Date: **22 November 2016**

PLEASE MENTION THIS NEWS-PAPER WHEN REPLYING TO THESE ADVERTS

ARCHANT

HIGHWAYS ACT 1980 – SECTION 116 STOPPING UP OF LAND AT SUBWAYS AT 1-2 BRIDGE WHARF AND FAIRMEADOW, MAIDSTONE

I AM GIVING NOTICE THAT The Kent County Council as Highway Authority for the County of Kent propose to make an application to the Magistrates' sitting at Maidstone Magistrates' Court on 17 February 2017 at 14:00 for an Order under Section 116 of the Highways Act 1980 to extinguish highway rights on the grounds that they are unnecessary on land at Subways at 1-2 Bridge Wharf and Fairmeadow, Maidstone as Land edged in red on the plan on deposit.

A copy of the draft order and the plan referred to are on deposit, and can be seen during normal office hours, at the main reception of The Kent County Council at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XQ.

Any person to whom this Notice has been given or who uses the highway specified or who would be aggrieved by the making of the Order may appear before the Magistrates' Court to raise an objection or make a representation on the application. Any person intending to appear before the Magistrates' Court at the hearing of the application is requested to inform Frances Pierre by post to Legal Services, The Kent County Council, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XQ, by email frances.pierre@kent.gov.uk, or by telephone 03000 420020 before 7 February 2017 quoting reference number LS/21/111389/760.

If you require further information or would like to discuss this matter, please contact Frances Pierre using the contact details shown above.

ROGER WILKIN
DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS,
TRANSPORTATION AND WASTE

highways england

M20 (JUNCTIONS 1 - 7) AND M26 (JUNCTIONS 1 - 3) MOTORWAYS TEMPORARY TRAFFIC RESTRICTIONS

Notice is hereby given that Highways England Company Limited (a) intends to make an Order on the M20 and M26 Motorways in the County of Kent, under Section14(1)(a) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 because works are proposed to be executed on the road.

The effect of the Order would be to:-

a) impose a 24-hour 40mph speed limit on;
   i) the eastbound carriageway of the M20 between Nepicar Lane underbridge and a point 300 metres east of Forstal Road overbridge;
   ii) the westbound carriageway of the M20 from a point 500 metres west of Junction 7 (A249) to a point 200 metres east of Ford Lane overbridge;
   iii) the eastbound carriageway of the M26 from a point 200 metres west of the road leading from Junction 2a (A20) to its merge point with the M20 at Junction 3;
   iv) the hard shoulder adjacent to the eastbound carriageway of the M20 between Junction 3 (M26) and Junction 7 (A249);
   v) the hard shoulder as described in c) below;
   vi) the entry slip roads leading to both carriageways at Junction 4 (A228);
   vii) the entry slip roads leading to both carriageways at Junction 5 (A20);
   viii) the entry slip roads leading to both carriageways at Junction 6 (A229); and
   ix) the distributor roads running adjacent to the M20 in both directions between Junction 5 (A20) and Junction 6 (A229);

b) authorise the overnight closure of;
   i) both carriageways of the M20 between Junction 1 (M25 Junction 3) and Junction 3 (M26 Link);
   ii) both carriageways of the M26 between Junction 2a (A20) and M20 Junction 3;
   iii) the link road connecting the clockwise carriageway of the M25 to the eastbound carriageway of the M20 (M25 Junction 3/M20 Junction 1);
   iv) the slip road leading to the eastbound carriageway of the M20 at Junction 1 (M25 Junction 3);
   v) the slip roads leading to both carriageways of the M26 at Junction 2a (A20);
   vi) both carriageways of the M20 between Junction 3 (M26 Link) and Junction 7 (A249);
   vii) the slip roads leading to and from both carriageways at Junction 4 (A228);
   viii) the slip road leading to the eastbound distributor road adjacent to the M20 at Junction 5 (A20);
   ix) the slip road leading from the eastbound distributor road adjacent to the M20 at Junction 6 (A229);
   x) the entry slip roads leading to and from the eastbound distributor road adjacent to the M20 at Junction 6 (A229);
   xi) the slip road leading to the westbound distributor road adjacent to the M20 at Junction 6 (A229); and
   xii) the distributor roads running adjacent to the M20 in both directions between Junction 5 (A20) and Junction 6 (A229);

c) permit overnight hard shoulder running on:
   i) the eastbound carriageway of the M20 from a point 200 metres east of Ford Lane overbridge to a point 200 metres east of the centreline of the A229 overbridge (Junction 6); and
   ii) the westbound carriageway of the M20 from a point 800 metres west of Boxley Road overbridge to a point 200 metres east of Ford Lane overbridge.

These measures would be in the interests of road safety while contractors undertake Advanced Motorway Indicator (AMI) works and All Lane Running (ALR) survey works.

It is expected that the work would last for approximately 5 months starting on or after Monday 2nd January 2017. The overnight closures would be conducted in phases. Those described in b) i) to v) above would take place on –

Mondays to Thursdays 22:00 – 05:30
Fridays 23:00 – 06:00
Saturdays 22:00 – 06:00 and
Sundays 22:30 – 05:30.

The remaining closures would take place between 20:00 and 06:00. Hard shoulder running would be in operation between 22:00 and 05:30.

The Order would come into force on 31 December 2016 and have a maximum duration of eighteen months.

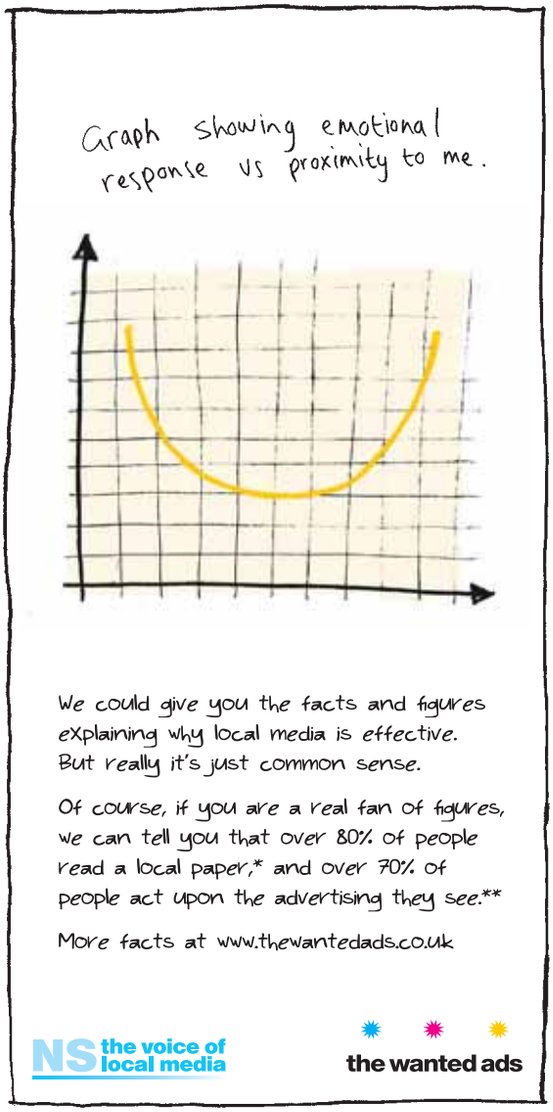
Traffic affected by the closures would be directed to leave and return to the carriageways, or diverted using other junctions on the M20 and M26, the M25, M2, A20, A228, A229, A249, Ashton Way, and the distributor roads running adjacent to both carriageways between Junction 5 (A20) and Junction 6 (A229). The route in operation would vary depending on the closure in force.

The temporary mandatory speed limits, closures and diversion routes would be clearly indicated by traffic signs when they are in operation during the works period.

M Taylor, an Official of Highways England Co. Ltd.
Ref: HE/SE/2016/M20/170

(a) Highways England Company Limited (Company No. 9346363). Registered Office: Bridge House, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4LZ. A company registered in England and Wales.

For enquiries, please contact the Customer Contact Centre on 0300 123 5000 or info@highwaysengland.co.uk. http://www.highways.gov.uk



*Source: GB TGI 2009 Q3 (April 2008 - March 2009)
**Source: The Wanted Ads STAGE 1. GFK NOP Base: all adults

Lifetime award for Dame Kelly

Teenager Jonjo Heuerman also scoops a Pride of Sport gong

Athletics

By Tom Pyman

tom.pyman@archant.co.uk

KENT'S double Olympic champion Kelly Holmes this week scooped a lifetime achievement gong at the Pride of Sport Awards.

The athlete, who lives in Hildenborough, was praised not just for her gold medals in the 800m and 1500m at the Athens Games, but her work to transform the life chances of disadvantaged young people through the Dame Kelly Homes Trust.

In 2004, she became the first Brit to win the Olympic middle-distance double in 84 years, over two golden nights for British athletics in the Greek capital, and later admitted her success left her "gobsmacked".

Guests at the awards in London on Wednesday heard how Dame Kelly joined Tonbridge Athletics Club aged 12 and immediately demonstrated her potential, becoming national 1500m champion for her age group within two years, but didn't take up the sport full-time until 1997.

Equally, though, she was hailed for her charity, which has now worked with more than 300,000 young people, with 70 per cent of people on its flagship Get on Track programme in employment, education or training by the time they completed it.

Speaking last month after the launch of a campaign to support some 3,750 young people across the county over the next four years with the help of world-class athlete mentors, Dame Kelly said: "As a local girl, I'm delighted that we're going to continue expanding our transformational programmes in Kent to transform the lives of young people who need our support most.

"I've seen over the past eight years the truly life changing impact that these programmes have on young lives and I'm really excited that more young people than ever before will benefit from our incredible athlete mentors."

Another county winner at the ceremony was Dartford teenager Jonjo Heuerman, who won the Young Fundraiser Award after using sport to raise more than £270,000 for research into bowel cancer.

INSPIRATION: Hildenborough's Kelly Holmes was honoured this week

Hopkins looks to build on breakthrough year

Motorsport

TEENAGE sensation Luke Hopkins will look to build on an impressive 2016 in the Team Green Junior Cup next year after agreeing to enter the FIM World Championship Superstock 300 in 2017.

The Sittingbourne speedster, who only started racing in 2015, finished runner-up in the Team Green Junior Cup on his Kawasaki Ninja 300, winning the Most Improved Rider trophy from the British Motorcycle Racing Club.

For 2017, Luke will compete in nine races at major European circuits, still on the Ninja 300, including Aragon, Assen, Silverstone, Misano and Magny Cours.

The Superstock 300 is a new production championship which has been designed as a feeder series to the higher classes within the World Superbike series.

LUKE: Photo by John Manclark

Although different bikes can enter the idea is to try and provide as level a playing field as possible to enable the riders to show their talents as racers and at an affordable cost.

Luke will be one of the youngest riders in the class as the minimum age to compete is 15-years-old with the purpose of the class being to enable teams in higher classes to identify emerging talent.

He said: "This is a great opportunity for me to grow as a rider. I should be racing against some of the best up and coming young talent in motorcycle racing in this championship, which can only help me improve.

"The wildcard appearances in Moto3 and the Team Green Junior Cup will not only enable me to catch up with good friends but also provide me with valuable track time too."

Sport Shorts

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Gills boss nominated for November displays

GILLINGHAM boss Justin Edinburgh was among the nominees for the Manager of the Month award in League One.

After a largely difficult start to the season, Edinburgh oversaw three victories in four league games in November, including an impressive 3-0 triumph over promotion-chasing Rochdale last time out at Priestfield.

A judging committee nominated Edinburgh for "making light of difficult circumstances and staying true to his footballing principles" as he lifted the Gills to within three points of the play-off places.

He was up against Scunthorpe United's Graham Alexander, Phil Brown of Southend United and Charlton's caretaker Kevin Nugent for the award.

The winner, decided by a panel that includes former Ipswich Town boss George Burley, Sky Sports EFL expert Don Goodman and Olaf Dixon from the League Managers' Association, was announced on Friday as Scunthorpe's Graham Alexander.

BOSS: Justin Edinburgh

SELECTED: Wicket-keeper-batsman Sam Billings will represent England

England give Billings nod for tour of India

KENT'S Sam Billings has been selected for England's tour of India next year in both the one-day international and T20 squads.

The wicketkeeper-batsman will meet up with his teammates in January after a Big Bash League spell in Australia this month.

Billings agreed to join Sydney Sixers last week, saying: "It's a great franchise and a great competition.

"Watching it the last few years has been great and to get the opportunity to play in it is fantastic."

The Sixers will launch the competition against defending champions the Sydney Thunder on December 20.

Billings was praised by England captain Jos Buttler back in October for his role in victory over Bangladesh.

Lengthy Vase trip for Corinthian

KENT'S last survivors in this year's FA Vase face a lengthy trip to Devon next month after being drawn away to Exmouth Town.

Southern Counties East League Premier Division outfit Corinthian, based in Longfield, near Sevenoaks, travel west some 200 miles on January 7 for the fourth round tie.

They reached the last 32 following a 4-1 victory over Sutton Common Rovers last weekend, courtesy of a hat-trick by Connor Johnson and another from Louis Clark.

Deal Town famously won the competition back in 2000 with a 1-0 win over Chippenham Town at the old Wembley Stadium, while the last county side to reach the final was Tunbridge Wells FC in 2013, who were beaten 2-1 by Spennymoor Town.

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